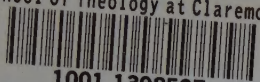


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THE GOSPEL AND HUMAN LIFE





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# THE GOSPEL

AND

# HUMAN LIFE

SERMONS

BY

ALFRED AINGER, M.A., LL.D.

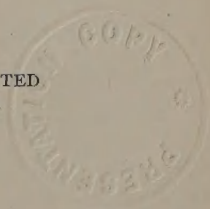
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## PREFACE

IT may be expected that I should conclude the task with which I have been entrusted of selecting from the sermons of my dear and honoured friend, the late Master of the Temple, by a statement of the principles that have guided my choice. My aim has been not to make the volume representative of the whole cycle of Christian truth, but to make it as characteristic as possible of the individual preacher. This will explain the omission of sermons upon the main Christian verities, such as the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of our Lord. Upon these the Master preached year by year, especially at the great Church festivals; but though he held these doctrines with sincere conviction, and urged them upon his congregation with force and eloquence, dreading the modern tendency to eliminate mystery from religion and to divorce faith from dogma, it was yet not his gift to expound the Christian dogmas

and mysteries in terms that should be especially appealing to the modern mind, and the sermons dealing with them are not therefore of any special theological value ; nor are they among his best. His power lay in other directions. The vindication of the Christian Gospel which had the most attraction for him, and in which he most excelled, was the proof of its suitability to human needs as they are revealed by experience of life. What most interested him in the world was human character in its mingled strength and weakness ; he was a keen observer and a shrewd judge of motive and disposition. What interested him most in religion was the character of Christ ; and the Christian faith presented itself to him as the God-appointed means for bringing that influence to bear upon the "hurrying, unsure" minds of men. The sermons headed "Christ before Christianity" and "Life through the Only-begotten Son of God" will make clear the theological position that was peculiarly his own.

But even when the more dogmatic sermons were put aside, the task of selecting from the residue was one of no little difficulty ; because every sermon had been composed with care, and represented the best thought of its writer upon the topic under discussion. In all there was to be found some flash of insight,

or some illuminating metaphor, or some trenchant saying. It seemed best, therefore, to divide the sermons into groups representative of the main lines of thought upon which their writer's mind moved, and to choose the most satisfactory expression of each. It is inevitable that some readers will be disappointed at not finding in the volume the particular sermon that they remember best. Several persons have been good enough to write asking for the inclusion of one sermon or another that impressed them when they heard it; and if it has not been possible to comply with their request, it is either because the sermon could not be found, or because it did not seem, on the whole, so likely as some other to be generally interesting. For a sermon may impress the memory for many reasons. The text or the topic may have been unusual. Sometimes a single sentence remains in mind when all the rest of the sermon, and even its subject, is forgotten; and in that case it may well be that the greater part of the sermon was not especially memorable. The Temple sermon that I myself recall most vividly was preached many years ago on a gloomy afternoon in February. The congregation was afflicted with an epidemic of coughing, through which Mr. Ainger's voice, silvery clear as it always was, could be heard with difficulty.

But at a certain point he introduced a line from *Macbeth*—

The eyes are open.

Ay, but their sense is shut—

spoken as only he could speak it ; and the effect was magical. The coughing ceased, and the remainder of the sermon was heard in silence. But although this was the sermon of which I had the most distinct recollection, I found, when I came upon it, that it was not so characteristic as many others.

As to the special ideal of preaching that the author of these sermons put before himself, the reader will find what may be regarded as an *apologia* in the course of the sermon, printed last in the volume, upon his predecessor in the office of Master of the Temple. It is an excellent defence of the function of preaching in the modern Church, against the idea that it should be a mere proclamation of the chief facts of the Christian religion. It will be remembered that St. Paul's image for the preacher was not that of herald but ambassador ; and an ambassador's duty is not limited to announcing the policy of his king, " whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear " ; he has to enforce it by arguments likely to make its reasonableness apparent to the persons to whom he is accredited ; and this he is

likely to do best if he sets out the arguments which have convinced himself. In the Master's opinion a preacher was best doing his duty to a congregation by taking human life as his own experience displayed it to him; neglecting no part of it; and interpreting it by the key of the divine Gospel. There is a sentence in a paper upon "Preaching," read at one of the Church Congresses, which puts this point of view in a telling phrase:—

"People are eager for a new sensation, no doubt; but the sensation they desire most profoundly is that of discovering how the words which are so hackneyed really touch and concern their *life*. Bacon said and showed how the secret of all scientific advance lay in the *commercium mentis et rerum*,—in the intercourse of the intellect with facts. We may adapt his metaphor, and say that all spiritual progress lies in the *commercium evangelii et vitæ*,—in the intercourse of the Gospel with the facts of life."

This passage will explain, and it is hoped justify, the title chosen for this collection of his own sermons. Their all-pervading aim is to get down to the real facts of human life, and to present them *sub specie eternitatis*.

To his task, so conceived, the late Master of the

Temple brought the peculiar powers of his mind. Those critical qualities which had won universal recognition in the world of letters, his penetrating insight into character, his equitable temper, high principled, even fastidious, and yet sympathetic, his fine appreciation of language as the expression of reality, were all employed in the service that lay nearest his heart. "Do not think me merely professional," he said once, "if I say that I regard my sermons as my chief work in life." He was speaking, of course, about the sermon as preached, not as printed. As to the claim of his own sermons to a permanent life, he was the last person to cherish illusions. No one knew better that with homiletic literature the only antiseptics are either originality of thought or magnificence of style, to neither of which he laid claim; so that for thirty years he put aside the importunity of friends who urged him to publish. But short of immortality, there is always a second term of existence for such divinity as has its roots in human experience, and there was no more humane theologian than the late Master. Those who were familiar with his pulpit method will not need to be warned against the search, in this volume, for purple passages of eloquence. It was a maxim of his that true eloquence resides in the thought, and, like



happiness, can never be attained when pursued as an end in itself. The maxim cannot, perhaps, be held universally true in a Church which numbers Jeremy Taylor among its preachers; but it is entirely true of himself. His eloquence lies in the extraordinary flexibility of his style, and in the perfect ease and grace with which his thoughts clothe themselves in language. Those thoughts, always worthy of their high subject, the product of his mingled wisdom and piety, will be cherished by those who, whether in London or Bristol, had the benefit of his ministerial care, and may be confidently trusted to extend its influence over a still wider circle.

A word may be allowed in conclusion as to the editing of the volume. It is the fate of all posthumous publications that they must go to press without receiving those last touches which the author's own hand would have given them. All that an editor can venture upon in such a case is to see that the ordinary rules of syntax are complied with, and that there is no unnecessary repetition of matter. Perhaps the absence of final polish, and in particular the retention of turns of phrase written to be spoken, may not be without its compensation for those to whom the preacher's voice and manner

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are still a living memory, if the sentences come recommended by something of the persuasive charm with which they were first delivered.

H. C. BEECHING.

LITTLE CLOISTERS, WESTMINSTER ABBEY,

*1st August 1904.*

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## I

### CHRIST BEFORE CHRISTIANITY

“So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth : and himself believed, and his whole house.”—JOHN iv. 53.

IT is the miracle of the nobleman's son at Capernaum which forms our Gospel for to-day.<sup>1</sup> The story, though in general outline so like many others of the same kind, has features of its own. The nobleman, who had heard of Jesus, the great worker of miracles, was not as yet, it would appear, a believer in Him in any other sense, but thought it at least worth trying whether his son, who was at the point of death, might not be cured by Him. At his first appeal, Jesus spoke what was, in fact, a rebuke. “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.” It was no solitary rebuke. The great worker of wonderful things went about preaching that a belief based upon the power to do such

<sup>1</sup> 21st Sunday after Trinity. »

things was worthless—a superstition, not a religion—and powerless to do any moral or spiritual good for the so-called “believer.” Jesus was continually preaching this truth in different forms. He knew the heart of man, and knew that to the end of time, as long as sin was in the world, men would discern God only or chiefly in the marvellous, in the magical, and not in that which is His essential characteristic, Holiness working through Love. All our superstitions at this day are of this nature—the result of the craving of the unenlightened soul for the magical and the marvellous. “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”

Thus we see that this unenlightened nobleman was in this condition when, having heard of the miracle-worker, he thought a miracle might be worked in the interest of his family, and was at least worth asking for. And when he heard this rebuke, almost a repulse, on the part of Jesus, the man was apparently shaken in his old attitude, and had his eyes partially opened to something in the divine figure standing before him, more truly divine than the power to do magical cures. He seems to have been struck by something in the look and voice of Jesus, something that said, “Yes, I can do magical acts, but my help for men is not in

these things, but in love, and pity, and interest in their needs and sorrows." He saw "Pity" shining out from that divine countenance, and knew that it was love he stood in need of, and not magic—that it was indeed "Love" and love alone that made the miraculous God-like. In a moment of time we notice a change in the man's attitude. His second utterance has another, and a new, note in it. "Sir, come down ere my child die!" It is the sense of need that we perceive here—the appeal to a Friend—the confession of helplessness. The tone has changed, because the purely human in the man has come to the front, and got the better of the purely mechanical view of Deity, as working wonders for wonders' sake. That is to say, the man's conversion was already at work in him. Jesus had already half conquered him before the healing act was yet wrought. We are sure of this, because Jesus no longer rebukes. He relents. His tone too is changed. "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth." And then, you remember how the story proceeds. The nobleman meets his servants on the day following, bringing him intelligence that yesterday "at the seventh hour"—at the very hour, that is to say, when Jesus had spoken His words of comfort—the fever had abated,

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and the sick boy was on his way to convalescence, and happiness and thankfulness brought back to the family hearth. And a result followed even more blessed than this: "himself believed, and his whole house."

It is in these last words that the real mystery and miracle of the whole story is summed up. As I have said, this class of story is so common in the Gospels that we pass it lightly by, as if we understood it, as if it expressed the most familiar of all experiences. But are we sure we could explain on the spot to any one who asked us, what we understand by the nobleman and his family believing then and there and thenceforth on Jesus Christ; and being made thereby, as we are sure we are meant to infer, "new creatures," with new characters, with a new sense of sin and of need, with new views of God and their fellows? You see, we know nothing of these persons save from the narrative before us. They come out of the darkness, and pass into it again. We are certain that up to this point they knew nothing, had heard nothing, of what we now understand by Christian theology. The facts of Christ's history were as yet incomplete. His death was yet in the future; His resurrection but dimly foreshadowed; His ascension into heaven,



His unity with the Father, undreamed of by the thousands who yet perceived that a great Prophet, and Manifester of the Divine, was among them. Anything like doctrine, which is simply the facts of Christ's nature, work, and life, formulated into creeds, did not exist, and could not have existed ; and yet in the person, the man, Jesus, reflecting the character of God and His purposes towards men, this nobleman had discovered sufficient to modify, nay to transform, his whole attitude towards religion. This is really a most extraordinary event, though, as I have said, we read of it and pass it by as one of the commonplaces of the Gospel. It is itself a thing far more marvellous than are the marvels, the miracles, to which in our downright strength of scientific assurance we think it well to refuse our belief. In these days, there are hundreds of well-meaning persons who declare that all that is high and pure and ennobling in Christ's teaching should still be cherished by us, and turned to use ; but that having thus sucked, so to speak, all the valuable juice of the fruit, we can throw away the old case—the skin, the peel, the rind—which enclosed it, as no longer of any use or concern. That is what people mean when they cry "Christianity without Dogma" ; "this is the medicine," they say, "for this age, and

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the only medicine which the sensible man will consent to take at the hands of the religious teacher of the future." Christ's morals, without any trouble as to Christ's own statements about Himself; Christ's morals without the Incarnation, without the Atonement, without the Resurrection: Christianity, in short, without Christ. But here, in the instance of this nobleman and of every other sufferer who came in the same way into connection with the Saviour, and was drawn towards Him and made a new creature by Him, it was the precisely opposite state of things. Here was a man to whom not Christianity, but Christ, was the motive force which changed him, and lifted him out of darkness into light!

"Himself believed, and his whole house." It is when we pause over such familiar words as these, and try to sound once more their depths, that we discover how unfathomable and how all-embracing is this fact of "belief" in a Personality affecting one's own personality, one's own will, and desire, and hope, for all time. For, as I have said, we are quite sure as to what the evangelists meant when they wrote of the casual passer-by in Judæa or Galilee "believing" or "not believing" in Jesus Christ after watching and hearing Him in their

streets. They certainly meant that this difference of attitude towards Jesus was affecting the lives of the several persons in a revolutionary way—transforming them, and destined more and more to transform them as they lived on. And yet it may perhaps seem to us, after eighteen centuries, so small a machinery to work so vast a result, compared with the complicated creeds and systems which the theologian invites us to accept as proof that we are believing in Christ. But yet it is because in Jesus Christ—in His human life, and fortunes, and methods, as worked out in those fields and highways of Judæa—is the germ of all Christian dogma, all theology, that in accepting Him, the nobleman and the centurion, the publican and the sinner, were accepting and appropriating that theology. They recognised, as their eyes were gradually opened, the God in Him—that is the “Incarnation”; their dead or dormant conscience was called into play, and as they watched His life and heard Him teach, they came to know for the first time what sin was, and that the blood of sheep and goats was futile to bring man nearer to God, and that some other offering was needed than that of the symbolic victim—and there was the germ of the Atonement. It was revealed to them by every act, every ministry

to the needs and sorrows of the people, that Jesus was the Lord of Life, and held the keys of life in His hand ; they saw their sick healed and their dead raised, and it must have been borne in upon them that when He, who called others from the grave, should Himself have accomplished to the full the human destiny He had adopted, and have yielded even to Death, that then it was not possible that He Himself should remain Death's captive—and herein was the germ of the Resurrection ! All, that is to say, that Jesus Christ was destined to be to the world of humanity was enfolded in Him, and manifest in His work, in the very hour when He had not where to lay His head ; and the ignorant and humble sinner whose path He crossed, following Him, and noting that He spake as no man ever spake, and was what no man before ever was, believing in Him, and turning that belief to the inspiration and guidance of his own life, was on his way to be a " new creature."

Now, these are simple truths, so simple that it is quite easy to overlook them. But just consider how salutary they ought to be for those who complain of the mysteries and subtleties they are compelled to swallow and to understand before they can be called Christian at all. You hear cultured

young men complain that Theology is all nonsense—a “farce”—so a gentleman once expressed it to me—and that the sooner we cease from preaching it the better. “Theology is not religion,” I have heard it said, “so sweep it all away and start afresh.” Well, that theology is not religion may be called a self-evident proposition, and is hardly worth affirming afresh. The point really is whether “Religion” as taught to those bystanders and wayfarers in Palestine was not itself a theology, and whether the presence of Christ in their midst did not comprehend all the great doctrines of our faith, even as the full-blown rose is contained within the bud. No, my brethren, we cannot excuse ourselves for not accepting Christ, by pleading that the labours of metaphysicians have made of these elementary dogmas too often subtleties and refinements that are not to our taste. It is not by these that we must measure ourselves. Rather let us contemplate, as with the eyes of the nobleman in our story, the presence and place of Jesus in the world, and ask how it is that the nobleman could “believe” in Him, and that we cannot. We cannot say, we dare not say, in the face of Christ’s rebuke, that it was the “signs and wonders” that made the nobleman believe. It was something at once higher and

deeper than "signs and wonders": it was the personal magnetism of the man Christ Jesus, reflecting in His manhood something far greater than human; it was this that sent him on his way believing and rejoicing. And it is with the work and influence of Jesus Christ, not with men's developments and mystifications of theology since, that we have to reckon when we want to find excuse for not taking our place beneath His banner, at the foot of His cross. And yet my experience shows me that this is one of the commonest excuses. "Do you expect me to believe all that rigmarole?" young men ask with a shrug of the shoulders. And our reply is *not at all*. Look at Jesus Christ as the nobleman looked at Him, unencumbered with any metaphysics. Look at Him as the Fountain of *Health*—health of body and of soul; the Pattern of all Goodness; the embodiment of a holiness which the greatest saint that ever has lived since has found infinitely higher than himself can hope to attain. Look at Him as the Fountain of *Pity*—pity for His suffering and sinning fellows; the Fountain of *Love*—longing for each one of us—the publican and the harlot no less than the young agnostic and man of the world. It is this Interpreter of life, and Refuge for life's evils, that you are rejecting when you plead

that you cannot be bothered with the intricacies of theology. Forget them for the moment, and turn instead to the Healer of the nobleman's son. And it may be, when you have learned what the nobleman learned from that contemplation, that even in the despised creeds and theologies of the divines you will there learn something of true and living that you had never suspected.

There is a famous tribute, which we have all heard, once paid by an English essayist to a lady of his acquaintance, in which he said that "to love her was a liberal education." It is indeed the most perfect compliment ever recorded, but it would not have become a household word with us were it not that it is more than a compliment, and sounds depths even of moral truth that Richard Steele himself perhaps did not divine. Sever the words from their original association, and the truth becomes one that St. Paul and St. John would have delighted to proclaim. Love is the only liberal education—the Love of the Highest when we have discovered it; the Love of the perfect Love, the perfect Goodness, the Father and Lord of our spirits. For remember what a "liberal education" imports. It means an education that educates a human being all round; guiding and training heart and spirit, as well as mind,

to the comprehension and imitation of all that is lovely and of good report. Much as we talk nowadays about our having at length come to understand the difference between "Education" and "Instruction," it is matter of grave doubt whether we have not yet to learn a great deal more about the only true education of a spiritual being. And it is love, and the consequent devotion to the Being who inspires that love, which as all history shows, and the history of our religion shows more certainly than all, has had power, and still has power, to call into play for the most perfect issues the faculties with which we are endowed. What trained those unlettered fishermen, Peter and James and John, to understand and diffuse a new gospel on the earth—what but love? What was it that transformed an already carefully trained scholar and theologian like St. Paul, and taught him that all his so-called education had only served to crush within him the fountains of sympathy and humility? What was it that first educated him to see and feel that all men were dear to God, and not merely his brother Pharisees? Nothing else than the new-born love for One whom hitherto he had misconstrued and persecuted. So it has been, is, and ever will be; and we do well seriously to ask ourselves whether in resisting Christ



we are not refusing the only perfect education for a being made in His image—made to be like Him—and having become unlike Him, made to be restored to that likeness by the Atonement, the reconciliation, His life and death alone could have brought about.

## II

### THE ENORMOUS INFLUENCE OF CHARACTER

“ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world : but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—  
ROMANS xii. 1, 2.

THIS chapter is memorable as marking a new stage in the Apostle's letter to the Romans. Up to this point he has been dealing in history and theology—the relation of the Law to the Gospel ; of works to faith ; of the Jew to the Gentile—but at this point he turns with splendid effectiveness to show the bearing of all this learning, all this argument, upon the character of the individual man, and on the homeliest and most practical duties of life. This twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is full of morality. It may even be said that it is full of maxims ; detached precepts, following one another with no visible

connection or association of ideas. "Be not wise in your own conceits." "Recompense to no man evil for evil." "Provide things honest in the sight of all men." "If it be possible, as much as lieth in *you*, live peaceably with all men";—these are a few of such maxims in the order in which St. Paul delivers them. If we met with these precepts elsewhere, with nothing leading up to, or following them, we might be in doubt how to class them. There is a vein of common sense in many of them; I mean a vein of that moral sagacity—the result of the experience of a statesman and man of the world, a Bacon or a Montaigne—which has discovered that success in life and personal comfort are more promoted by following such precepts than by flying in the face of them. But others, again, I need not say, declare at once a widely different authorship. "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." Sayings such as these claim kindred with the Sermon on the Mount: that sermon which is the true spiritual progenitor of all later sermons on Christian morality. And though, as I have said, the teaching here is in this way fragmentary, that the

precepts follow one another in an order which gives no organic unity to the whole as a moral discourse ; in another way they are not fragmentary, but are bound together by virtue of the opening words of the chapter : “ I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

( There is not allowed to be any doubt as to the basis of the morality which the Apostle inculcates. He, at least, gives no sanction for the popular belief that men may be made moral without the aid and intervention of religion. { “ Oh, you Sunday teachers,” men are heard to cry, “ will you not give us less *religion* and more *morality* ! Will you not cease to lay stress upon dogma, and devote the time to defining and driving home the much-neglected duties and responsibilities of man’s everyday life ! Will you not enforce and explain such teaching as the Sermon on the Mount, and this chapter of St. Paul ! When men have learned, and taken to heart, and put into practice these simple duties of conduct, *then* it will be surely time enough to turn to the mere embellishments of morality : its imaginative concurrents of Heaven and Hell ; of rewards and punishments ; and the metaphysical distinctions of

the Incarnation and the Trinity.” } You know how common this sort of talk is. But the very catechisms and primers of morality to which they point—the moral discourses of our Lord and of St. Paul—give us no help or encouragement to have recourse to the method urged upon us. We find, it is true, maxims of morality in both. But in both we find these maxims of morality based upon certain facts which we are required to assume. The whole Sermon on the Mount rests upon the presumption that we have a Father in heaven, in knowledge of whom stands our eternal life. The whole of this wondrous exposition of Christian character not only is made to depend upon all the theology that has gone before—“I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God”—but it further is made to follow as the natural corollary from that doctrine of the mystical union between Christ and His Church of which you will find the man of the world to be exceptionally scornful: “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”

My brethren, when people talk lightly of teaching men to be good first, and going on afterwards, if at all, to the subtleties of theology, have they ever considered the probabilities of result in such a case? Suppose, in the touching and beautiful disquisition

on Christian graces that occupies this chapter of St. Paul, we were to omit the basis of theology. Suppose that we were to borrow from it all its ethical teaching, and reject the theological as superfluous or obsolete. We present ourselves as teachers of righteousness before a mixed congregation of all ages and tastes; of different education and experience; of every variety of inherited and acquired character; we begin to advise them and exhort them as to the line of conduct that will be best for them and for others in the long run. Recognising as we do how much moral beauty and truth is contained in these sentences of the Apostle, we have a notion that the beauty and truth ought somehow to commend themselves to others also, by their own self-evolved light. And no one can say that St. Paul's catalogue of Christian virtues is one-sided; that it represents the passive, martyr-like conception of virtue. It does not at all favour the idea of the monastic life as the highest form of excellence, or the best discipline of character. It regards men as social beings; as having social duties, and so having for the most part to work and earn their living in the station to which God has called them. It recognises that, as our homely proverb says, it "takes all sorts to make a world," and that each talent and each occupation

assigned to men has its special snares, and needs special gifts for its proper exercise. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." This is one side of this most comprehensive code of morals. Active work in the very heart of the world, and in full touch of all our fellows, is presumed to be our lot. There, for each of us, is the plot of ground we have to cultivate, and where we are to work out our salvation. Then follow a list of our duties to others, and our duty to ourselves, in the way of cultivating character. It is true that a few sentences and phrases appear to have reference to the religion and the theology which our utilitarian theory of morals of course rejects. Such phrases as "*serving the Lord*," "continuing instant in prayer," "Vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord,"—these will have to be omitted ; but still there is much left that the believer in the sufficiency of moral teaching will not object to reproduce.

Well then, after all that suggests or implies the supernatural has been eliminated, we come to that mixed audience just referred to, with our list of maxims, preserving the Apostle's own language. We repeat after him : "Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love ; in honour

preferring one another. Not slothful in business. Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation. Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." It would be difficult to find anywhere in the Christian writings a more succinct statement of what constitutes the perfection of Christian character. It is not a list of commands, or instructions what to do. It does not present a list of good deeds to be done, and evil deeds to be refrained from. It does not say "*Do* this" or "*that*." It says "*Be* this" and "*Be* that." It declares for the most part the components of character, rather than rules of action. It says, "Be earnest and diligent; cultivate hope; cultivate patience under sorrow or suffering; cultivate the spirit of active sympathy with others in joy and in grief; cultivate humility in your judgments of self, and the ready willingness to appreciate others, to recognise worth wherever found, and to do it honour. And though dissension may be impossible to avoid, take care that the causes of it do not lie in yourself." Such



we may call the ethical substance of this passage. We borrow it as our gospel; only omitting any conception of man's relation to God that is taught in Christian theology. Having eliminated Heaven and Hell, the doctrine of the need of an atonement with God, and the hope of life eternal, we present the moral residuum for the consideration and acceptance of our audience. "It is good to be brotherly and sympathetic; it is good to deny self for others; it is good to be earnest and hard working; it is good to be humble, and not to despise others who have not our cleverness and our culture." Here is our gospel; and we present it for the acceptance of the selfish man, who has been playing his own game and considering his own interests for so long, that the habit has become second nature; of the cynic, who has grown old in scorn of all the "windy ways of men"; of the intellectual student, who divides all outside his circle into fools and Philistines; for the bitter and discontented, who are unhappy unless they have a grievance; for the loungeur through life, who never did, and never means to do, a stroke of work that he can help; who has accustomed himself to put on one side all the hardness of life, and to shirk every responsibility that interferes with his love of ease.

The world is full of these ; and we are told again and again that they are to be roused, if at all, not by a theology which as men of the world they know to be exploded, but by setting forth the great lesson that morality is after all identical with self-interest ; or else that as members of a social body it is necessary to be moral in the general interest. For these reasons we are to plead, "Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good" ; and in course of time things will greatly mend, even if the "Golden Year" does not soon arrive when "all men's good will be each man's rule."

"Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good." A splendid and comprehensive cure for all the evils of the individual and of society—*if only it were followed*. But divorced from any assurance of power in us to follow it, or of hope of its ultimate attainment, it remains a piece of advice only, and not a gospel for sin-stricken humanity. We may tell the selfish man to be unselfish ; and the cynic to be kindly ; and the Pharisee, whether in religion or wealth or intellect, to be humble ; and the idler to turn to, and work to some good end—but who will believe our report, or be convinced by our reasonings? Can you imagine a cynic whose cynicism is engrained, or an egoist whose egoism is

the habit of years, listening for one moment to our arguments, when we tell them that selfishness and scorn are blots upon the fair ideal of humanity which it is becoming in us to exhibit as fairly as circumstances will allow? Perhaps neither one nor the other has any understanding of what we mean. When a certain quality has become inveterate in us, it seems to us nature; we can no more change it by wishing to do so, than the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots. And so it comes about that we are at a dead-lock. The patient does not understand that he is diseased. How shall we help him by telling him he ought to understand it, and that he could then "minister to himself"? Alas! therein we cannot minister to him, nor he to himself. We may make a man adopt religious habits, and do certain religious acts, and give of his alms to feed the poor; but we cannot form character—for character must be developed from within. We cannot give men a receipt for making themselves earnest, loving, humble, patient, and hopeful. And yet the formation of character is the first proof and sign of our being regenerate! It is here that the utilitarian theory of morals breaks down. Character will exhibit itself in action no doubt; but no prescribed list of acts, however scrupulously observed,

will work backwards upon character. Persuade a man, in the general interest, that he ought to give all his goods to feed the poor ; and he may act upon this, and yet not become "kindly affectioned to others in brotherly love" ; he may be still without charity, and be nothing.

We cannot be kindly affectioned by being told to be so ; we cannot exchange our deep-seated pride of self for true humility by any disquisitions on the superiority of the latter grace. We cannot learn patience under suffering by a mere exercise of will. A gospel of good advice is no gospel ; and if St. Paul's code of morals had been that, and nothing more, he would never have been to myriads of Christians the channel of a grace that has lifted them above self into the life of Jesus Christ. ( The respect in which this sermon of his differs from a sermon on morality, lies really in that little word, which he uses to introduce it ; that word "therefore." "I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." *Therefore*—for these reasons ; for those reasons which he has laboured to set forth, and which found their culmination in the rapture of that apostrophe with which the eleventh chapter ends :

'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! . . . For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." "I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God." On this apprehension of God's mercies, of His love for us, His pity for us, Paul rests his appeal to us to be better. He would have this sense of what we *owe* to God, of our dependence on Him and our unworthiness of Him, to dwell in our souls, and so quicken and educate the graces that make up character. St. Paul knew well enough (what no man who has ever looked into his own heart can possibly fail to know) that no one can transform his nature by being told to do so. The proud man cannot become humble at the word of command. He can only become humble by being possessed by a totally different ideal than that he has hitherto aimed at; by being possessed by the presence of a God to whom he owes all things; against whom he has rebelled; and by whom he has been promised forgiveness. I cannot conceive of character, as described here by the Apostle, being formed except by the conscious or unconscious measure of oneself against a righteous and loving Father. Can we

be loving, except in the thought—the habitual consciousness—of one who loves us? Can we be humble, with any worthy humility,—can we be peace-loving, save and except by having within us that abiding standard of righteousness and wisdom which we owe to Jesus Christ? What can make us patient under affliction; devotional in heart; reverent of spirit, but the dominant presence and authority of the same divine Being in our souls? These commands or exhortations of St. Paul are hard enough. With all the help that he offers; with the motive power that he suggests; with the perfect model and inspiration that he holds up before us, who can hope to attain to this character? He did not think he had himself attained to it. “I count not myself to have apprehended,” he said, “but I follow after, if haply I may some day attain.” His Master had said, “Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect”; and he could not dare to set before men a lower standard. And he knew that in aiming at the unattainable, and in cherishing the constant presence and hope of the infinitely good and loving, men grow into the likeness they adore, and become conformed and assimilated to it, in a degree which those never attain who content themselves with the standard of the mediocre. For it is

better to have aimed at the unattainable, and to have failed, than to have made finite rules and a decent decorum our standard, and to have kept it to the world's satisfaction.

And, after all, character is our first and vital concern. You do not think, I am sure, when I say *character* (misled by our lax use of terms) that I mean *reputation*. Character is what we are; and it is by what we are that our spiritual state is gauged, or at least by what we are striving after. There is a lax and dangerous way of talking, as if we might neglect to think of ourselves; as if the only real religion of the future was to lie in doing active work for others, and not thinking about our own state and our own salvation. No doubt religion has often been preached as a selfish thing; and as if its chief object was a means of securing our personal safety. God knows, religious persons have too often given excuse for this accusation. Other-worldliness has been as self-absorbing as worldliness, and as valueless in its effect upon others. But the existence of this snare must not conceal from us that our duty to others, as well as to ourselves, lies in being made purer, more earnest, more humble, more patient, more kindly. It is through our own growth in grace that we diffuse the knowledge of God, and commend

His kingdom. For we are members one of another, and it is so that we help one another. Who can say how much we owe to the influence upon us of Christian character? Who will say that the knowledge of what the Christian creed has effected upon the wills and affections of sinful men, is not one of the most, perhaps the most potent evidence for the truth of that creed? I am sure that this is so. Who is there of us who when we are oppressed by doubts and difficulties; by the arguments of this or that writer; by the weight of the silences of God,—has not found comfort and fresh life in dwelling upon some historic name, or perhaps some friend or relation or teacher whose character has been made beautiful through this very faith that for the moment we are inclined to put away from us? What made that sufferer patient; what made that worldly man spiritual; what made that trifler earnest; what softened that self-contained nature, till it overflowed with brotherly love and tender compassion? We cannot put on one side the true answer to such questions. We may refuse much else; but here remains a truth that no one can take from us, or diminish the value of, that through faith in a personal God to whom they were related, men had become beautiful of character. No other cause can



be assigned for the result; no other root for the flower and fruit produced. How can we, seeing these things, cease to preach that which Paul here preaches? There may be—there are—fifty different reasons why it is good to “abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good,” and to be humble, reverent, earnest, and loving; but there is only one Power that can make us so—the perception of the love of God and the submission to its rule. I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, that ye present yourselves—bodies, souls, and spirits—a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

### III

## CHARACTER AND INTELLECT

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”—  
I COR. xiii. 1.

THE Apostle's subject in this famous chapter is really the relative value and importance of intellect and conduct. For we cannot bear too clearly in mind that it is as the creator and moulder of human character that Charity or Love is here extolled. St. Paul leaves us in no manner of doubt on this head. He proceeds to describe the great grace whose praises he has first declared. Now it is impossible to describe a sentiment. It was perhaps as a sentiment that too many of these Corinthian Christians had accepted previous injunctions to cultivate the grace of brotherly love, and if so, the only course open to a teacher was to enumerate the fruits of that grace, where it was genuine, so as to supply his hearers with a satisfactory test, always at

hand and available, by which to distinguish a mere sentiment from the real thing, which to be worth anything must be a power as well as a feeling. And the Apostle accordingly proceeds to describe Charity, in the character of a living force, controlling, as well as inspiring, the wills and affections of sinful men. And in so doing, he inevitably describes, if not defines (for character is so wide and deep a thing as to defy definition), that which we mean when we say of any one that his character is beautiful, lovable, helpful to the cause of God and to the well-being of his fellows. In a very few lines, the writer, with consummate insight into the heart and will, sets forth Love as making men lovable. He begins by distinguishing its province and field of operations from any over which learning and intellectual skill and accomplishment, and even faith (when it consists only of faith in one's own opinions), can exercise influence. Religion, which is a religion of mechanical observances, or else a regulated outlet for pecuniary sacrifice, is also carefully distinguished from it; and then the writer, having cleared the ground by dispelling certain inveterate fallacies of the religious professor, proceeds to sum up the effects upon any person's character in whom the real thing is at work. It engenders, he says, patience and forbearance; it

burns up envy and jealousy ; it makes men modest and unselfish and sweet-tempered ; it makes them intolerant of the inevitable evil that lies about them in the society in which their lot is cast, and makes them ever keen and alert to weaken its influence, and drive it out by the example of something better ; it makes them strong to endure, eager to discover and welcome truth, full of hope for themselves and others. • Here, you see, is no separation of the active and passive sides of the influence of Love upon character. No trace is here of that which modern objectors to the Christian morality have sometimes alleged against it—that it is a one-sided morality ; of that saint-like type which glorifies meekness and submission, and turning the other cheek, and the capacity to suffer without flinching ; making these the be-all and end-all of Christian character. Love, in St. Paul's view, makes men full of energy to do as well as of readiness to bear. And indeed it is hard to say what quality of the character which, after eighteen hundred years, we are still agreed to recognise as perfect, is not to be found in this catalogue of virtues, which St. Paul declares to be the fruit of Charity and to be impossible without it!

And since it is plainly because of its fruits that St. Paul magnifies the grace of Charity, we shall

hardly be doing injustice to his argument by saying that, after all, the distinction he draws is between intellect and character, as things to be sought after for ourselves and revered in others. The text condenses it into an epigram, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as the blare of the trumpet, or the clang of the cymbal." A wonderful and significant simile to us in our day! St. Paul knew nothing of the modern orchestra. He meant by it, presumably, only showy noise and display, loud enough to attract any attention however little cultivated. We may read into it yet other lessons, not less important; for the trumpet and the cymbal have their right and due place in the orchestra, and contribute their necessary share to the "concord of sweet sounds," and to the intention of the great Master whose meaning they help to interpret. But by themselves what are they but "sound and fury, signifying nothing"? They are useless, and without beauty, unless they take a subordinate place, and unless they co-operate for something greater than themselves. So, says the Apostle, the "speaking with tongues," the display of special gifts not possessed by others—most fertile source of vanity, arrogance, and satisfaction with self; the reputation for intellectual superiority, for

gifts, for accomplishments; these without Charity, that is to say, without character—what a small part of the creature man—man made first in God's image, and to reflect and commend God to others—do these constitute! The object of Charity is to make men love, and to make them lovable. How much of this result is attained by intellect without character?

It was within a comparatively small ring-fence of a struggling church, separated by hard and fast lines from the heathen and corrupt populace outside, that the problem had risen for solution, which St. Paul sets himself to solve. It was on purely religious questions—the diffusion of the knowledge of Christ by the ability and fervour of those already possessing it—that this question of ~~what I call~~ Intellect *versus* Character had risen. But as it is a question going down to the deeps of human personality, it never disappears, but is ever present, and ever pressing for our decision. It is a perennial danger, because a perennial temptation—that steady, never-changing temptation to value ability, talent, learning, accomplishment, even “cleverness,” the cheapest and most worthless of them all—to value these above goodness, and to ignore the certain truth that, where these things are not given by nature (as must be the case with the majority), they are not to be acquired by

apeing those who have them, by the mere mimicry of "gifts," which everywhere abounds, the tinsel which obtains acceptance as the glorious gem of the mountain or the sea, the surface cleverness which we daily meet, the borrowed tricks of style and manner and talk, the assimilative skill, wherein is no reality, no root, because no heart. St. Paul did not malign or disparage gifts, ~~like the Puritan of a later day.~~ Himself a man of rarest genius, is it likely he would stultify his own mission and function by disparaging the great gifts which, inspired and guided by Love, were helping to mould the whole future of the world? "Covet earnestly the best gifts," he said; every talent and faculty that God has bestowed on your mysterious individuality welcome and turn to the Master's use. You may have got, by comparison with many a colleague and companion, a small share of those brilliant and showy gifts; but do not think that God has left you without compensation. Charity will inspire, and make to live and move and quicken, another self within you, a self as yet lying torpid, and unknown even to yourself. And he reminds them what Charity can do: how it can bring to life all that makes man's best influence on man, and can do what genius, talent, knowledge, are powerless to do. None of these things can

purify the moral atmosphere, and quicken the moral conscience of the society in which they move. Charity is itself a power, a gift, a talent, with its own weapons, its own instruments, and its own sphere and opportunities.

*Cleverness without Conscience*: the curse, not especially of this, but of every age, and the deadliest snare. St. Paul's eulogium on Charity it may suit us to look back upon with patronising tolerance, as the rhapsody of a mystic, who finds in some ecstatic emotion a panacea for every human ill. We do not in these days—those of us who are educated persons—much believe in panaceas. Charity may conceivably promote almsgiving and kindness and toleration, but what, men have asked themselves, can it have to do with “not rejoicing in iniquity,” or “rejoicing in truth”? This peculiar expression of the Apostle's has been well paraphrased, I think, as follows: “Love has no pleasure in the advance of wickedness, but she shares the joy of the triumph of goodness.” On a first glance this might seem a superfluous warning for a community ostensibly Christian; for who, we might ask, but a fiend in human shape could ever love to see wickedness prosper for its own sake—even of those who are themselves not careful to observe a high standard



of duty or conduct? This is how we blacken or distort the warnings of Scripture in order to conceal our own liability to them, our own need of them. There is such a thing as a "rejoicing in iniquity" rampant among us, which is closely bound up with the worship of talent, of cleverness, and the concurrent decay of Charity. For the keen, intense love of one's brother means, in fact, the keen, intense love of what is righteous—of all that is pure, lovely, and of good report. This is the truth which harmonises all those various functions which St. Paul ascribes to the grace he is commending. The intense love of one's brother means that one yearns for the best to befall him; that he should live his true life, and enjoy the highest good, because that alone brings about the highest happiness and joy. Hence the fact that one is *not* working for this—*not* working to raise the standard of purity and goodness in the world, but rather to lower it by confusing the boundary lines between "iniquity" and the "truth" (to keep to St. Paul's words); by removing old landmarks; by turning to ridicule old scruples; by sneering at the "Philistine" (a phrase which means apparently any one with a sense of decency still surviving)—shows that the divine grace of Love is waning, and that nothing but its return

to reign in our hearts, can purge us of the guilt of "rejoicing in iniquity." I am not afraid of asking you to employ this test, by way of testing St. Paul's "panacea." It is the one Christian panacea. Paul saw it, and John saw it, because they had alike learned it from Him "whose nature and whose name is Love." Think of the bad and foul books—the corrupt novels and the plays which are the chief intellectual amusements, so called, of thousands, increasing every day. What are these but intellect without conscience? and a very little intellect makes a great show where it stimulates the subtle pride of being superior to common humdrum folks. Do we any longer ask what Charity should have to do with these things, or with the cure of them? Just imagine a sudden passion of real love for one's kind reaching the dead conscience of the writer, or the reader, of such stuff. Would not the pen fall from the hand of the one, and the book from the hand of the other, and would not both sink down in shame and remorse before the felt presence of an outraged God and an outraged neighbour?

*Cleverness without Love!* This is St. Paul's warning, and this warning must be declared afresh in every age. If Charity is the one source of all that is best in human character, we need not waste

any more wonder why St. Paul should be careful to compare or contrast it with Faith and Hope, and declare that it is the greatest. For indeed Love is the atmosphere in which alone the light of Faith and Hope can burn. Love creates character, and character, in return, makes lovely and makes lovable. There is a witchery and a glamour which attends intellectual gifts in life, winning admiration and popularity, and even the semblance of affection. But when Death has come in to place the object of these at a distance from earth and time, it is to something far other than "cleverness" that Memory turns instinctively to brood over and cherish. Not the gifts, but the graces, then; not the cleverness, not the accomplishments or learning, not the wit and humour, but the touches of human sympathy and tenderness: the self-denial, the patience and forbearance, the nobility of aim, the steadfastness of purpose, the fact that the atmosphere of life and society was higher, nobler, purer, where such an one moved and spoke—just all those things which St. Paul found to have their source and spring in Charity. Yes, Death is a marvellous dispeller of illusions in such matters: it cuts through many of our sophistries, because it throws the departed spirit into sole relation with the one Fountain of Love and

Righteousness, and all lower and lesser comparisons are burned up in the process.

Very real and practical, then, is the beautiful collect for Quinquagesima, which turns the lesson of this chapter into a prayer that God would "pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of Charity, the very bond of peace, and of all virtues." It translates the mystical into the practical in a way which should dispel any lingering notion that St. Paul's counsel is one of perfection, or a subject for meditation in some seventh heaven of aspiration. And it comes well to prepare the way for the season of Lent, when we are called to mourn over the decay and torpor of all virtues in all, the best of us; upon the coldness of heart which will not let them thrive, which checks them, like a killing frost, and leaves us unfruitful; unworthy of our high destiny and unfitted for it. St. John, the so-called Apostle of Love, is not one jot less practical, less "utilitarian" shall we say, than his brother apostle. He too will hear of no love being true that will not bear being judged by its fruits; and these, not of a sentimental affection, or a mystical rapture, but the plain fruits of everyday conduct: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments."

## IV

### THEOLOGY AND LIFE

#### (THE STORY OF NICODEMUS)

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”—JOHN  
iii. 7.

TRINITY Sunday once more brings with it the eternally interesting story of Nicodemus and his interview with Christ. The reason why this scripture should have been chosen for the day when we commemorate the supreme mystery of our Christian faith is not superficially obvious, but it at least has a momentous bearing upon that mystery, when we recognise that the theme it expounds is the connection of Theology with Life—that connection which the religionist at one end of the scale, and the worldling at the other, are so slow to discover. In this case it is the religionist whose difficulties and engrained prejudices are so strikingly laid before us. Here is a devout and consistent Jew—a “Ruler” of

the Jews, a member of their Sanhedrin, in character and learning a representative champion of the faith—who has been profoundly struck by certain acts and words of the new Teacher, in whom, however, he and his colleagues could see no credentials that pointed to His being the promised Messiah. Nicodemus had been struck by Christ's moral doctrine, for he addresses Him as Teacher. He calls Him Rabbi, and he allows, in his own name and that of his fellows, that He is a teacher come from God. And if Nicodemus had stopped at that point, we might have classed him with those of the common people who had heard Jesus gladly, and recognised that there was something divine in Him, just because of His words—just because He spake as man never spake—just because He spoke “as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” But Nicodemus goes on to give his own reason for regarding Jesus as a teacher come from God: “For no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” The logic here is not very clear to us; and indeed there were probably clouds and confusions in the speaker's own mind. We do not perhaps understand why the fact that a man is endowed with the power of working miracles should constitute a claim to his

being a "teacher"—one, that is, who can impart or convey wisdom to the soul of the learner. Yet the very incongruity here may help us to realise the standpoint from which Nicodemus began his questionings. He puts the working of miracles in the very forefront of his argument. He argued, that is to say, that Jesus must be a teacher worth listening to because He also worked miracles ; and in so doing, he showed how far he was from the possibility, while under this delusion, of understanding Jesus at all. For all through His life of healing and raising from the dead, Jesus had never ceased to instil the opposite doctrine, namely, that the use of the miracles was to *illustrate* His teaching, but not to convert, or to be any substitute whatever for that teaching. To the superficial observer, Jesus Christ was for ever contradicting Himself, or was ever at cross-purposes with Himself. He was for ever working miracles, and yet for ever warning His disciples against trusting to them as proofs of His divinity, or as constituting in themselves any proof of His being the true and only deliverer of mankind from their direst evils, Sin and Death. If there were no other proof forthcoming of Jesus being a teacher greater than human, it might be found here—in His working miracles, and yet refusing to base upon them any

vital assurance of His claims upon the attention and obedience of the world. Apart from the moral and spiritual virtue that went out from Him, by quite other channels, miracles were idle, or worse; and Jesus never failed to rebuke and to warn those who fondly believed that the evidence of God, derived from the miraculous, was sufficient for man's salvation. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

Here then was one symptom of the moral or spiritual deficiencies that marked the devout theologian Nicodemus. His attitude towards Jesus was as yet, as he so frankly admitted, determined chiefly by the sight of wonder-working. God must be with Him, helping Him to what man unassisted cannot do, therefore here was a teacher come from God. And now he was at once, under the marvellous questioning of Jesus, to show how little he understood what a teacher "come from God" must mean. We must have been struck by the apparent omission of part of the dialogue between Jesus and this Jewish ruler. The latter makes the opening announcement we have just been considering, and Jesus replies, "Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." What



is the missing link here? we ask. Nicodemus had put no question, he had but made a statement, and yet Jesus seems to have divined the dormant question that was waiting in the man's breast to be asked—afraid or ashamed (and Nicodemus was timid, and had come to Jesus under cover of the night) to declare itself. Well, we had read, just before this incident, that Jesus "needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man"; and He knew (as no man could know) what thoughts and wonderings lay in the heart of Nicodemus. But the very preamble of Nicodemus had laid bare the essential blankness and barrenness of his spiritual outlook. He had revealed, as we have seen, his defective idea of what teaching is, and his undivine theories of what constitutes "God being with man." And in both there was a revelation of unspirituality, which in itself suggested the one only remedy for the man's case. Notwithstanding his religion and his religiousness; notwithstanding that his life's chief interest and its chief study was in the Sacred Books that constituted God's gradual revelation of Himself and education of His creatures; notwithstanding, as we may well suppose, that like his greater brother Pharisee to come, he was "as touching the law blameless," he had not yet attained even a glimpse

of what was meant by a new vision—in which all things in heaven and earth should seem different ; all men and women take a new meaning and a new value and importance in his sight ; the whole height and depth of the words “Holiness” and “Sin” become new factors in the universal outlook ;—a change so vast, so fundamental, so transfiguring, that the only adequate account of it was to call it a new *Birth*. He had no conception that the kingdom of God, which he had seemed to see so near, and to be able to claim as so entirely his own—so easy to map out and to describe—had never yet even lain within his field of vision,—that to see it, the change must come first. “Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

We have most of us wondered at, and attempted in our different ways to account for, the obtuseness, of whatever sense spiritual or intellectual, which made this phrase meaningless to the great scholar Nicodemus. “How can a man be born again,” he asked, “when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Was this a proof of how morally dead the questioner was, or how deficient in imagination ; how terribly unpoetical and prosaic? Or was it the clever rhetorical device of an antagonist, who, as it were,

feigned ignorance or imperfect understanding, in order to draw out further explanations from his questioner? We cannot be sure; but I think it quite conceivable that the perplexity was genuine. We forget that for eighteen hundred years the world of Christendom has been learning in a myriad ways the application of Christ's words, and verifying them. To the Christian, indeed, those words declare a truism; an axiom, rather, of the Christian faith. We may easily forget how different they would sound in our ears if they came to us for the first time, and if our ears had been trained, as those of Nicodemus, upon melodies and harmonies so different. We have around us—in the books we read, in the friends we know, in the lives of God's saints, past and present, in the very spirit of Christ ever at work, combating, conquering, neutralising the spirits of the world and the Devil,—we have around us, I say, interpreters of what Christ meant when He said that His Spirit, entering into and possessing a human being, so transforms his every view of life and death, of good and of evil, of duty and responsibility, and of every human face and form on which he gazes, that there is no adequate description of this change, except to say that he who experiences it is "born again." Nicodemus, we may not forget, had as yet

no such witnesses about him. His creed, and his pride and confidence in that creed, had as yet made it painful and odious to him to contemplate any new creed that made his own untenable. Though a keen and ardent religionist, his morality was a dead and fossil morality; though a theologian, he did not know what Spirituality,—that is to say, being “born of the Spirit”—could possibly mean. Neither had he as yet any clue in his own inmost nature to the meaning of the “kingdom of God,” or the “kingdom of heaven.” For his religiousness had killed the human heart within him. He could not “see” the kingdom of God, for he looked at life and conduct, at heaven and earth, through the distorting spectacles of his narrow and unhuman creed.

*Unhuman*, my brethren, which is the first step, or an early stage, to being *inhuman*. Nothing in the world interested this man Nicodemus save the things of his Church—his orthodoxy and his monopoly of God’s favour. The rest of life, and of the world of men and women, lay outside the narrow field of his sympathies. Reflect upon the gulf that separated the teacher Jesus and the teacher Nicodemus. They had the same outward organs of vision; but yet, when Jesus looked upon some outcast, publican, or sinner by the wayside,

and when Nicodemus cast eyes upon the same object, how different to the two was the thing seen! "Unless a man be born again," said Jesus, "he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." Do not be afraid to accept naturally and literally that word "see." One must be able to see, to recognise, the kingdom of heaven, before one can hope to enter into it. The vulgar, conventional interpretation, I doubt not, in many minds of the phrase, "see the kingdom of heaven," or enter into it, is that it means, "be admitted to Heaven when we die." As long as we thus narrow and abuse the glorious truth taught by Christ, we are every bit in as unspiritual a condition as was the Pharisee Nicodemus. He too had, we doubt not, got as far as believing that he was sure of Paradise, with all the "accursed people who knew not the Law" lying outside. It was not a heaven of selfish and peculiar enjoyment that he wanted his faith strengthened in; it was that he might see that heaven, where he had never looked for it, latent in the heart and conscience of the humblest beggar lying at his door. Man has been called a "microcosm," a little world: what the Pharisee needed to realise was that in every man and woman was comprised a little Heaven, or a little Hell!

And this new view of his kind could only be won by shifting his moral standpoint, his moral outlook ; by standing side by side with Jesus of Nazareth, and looking with His eyes upon the sin and sorrow-defaced forms and faces of poor human nature. To recognise the kingdom of heaven as latent in human beings, and as revealed and patent in Jesus Christ, this is to *see* the kingdom of heaven ; and to *enter into it* is to fall down in penitence and humility before it, crying, Pharisee and publican alike, "We have sinned against Heaven ; and save through a help held out to us from heaven, to purify and to inspire, that kingdom can never be our consummation and our goal." The "water," emblem of cleansing ; the Spirit, emblem of the force that quickens and strengthens : "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

But, my brethren, we have only half learned the lesson of this memorable history if we imagine it to be addressed only or chiefly to the narrow and hard-hearted religionist, such as Nicodemus. We have them still among us, no doubt : persons, alas ! in whom their very religiousness has killed their humanity, killed that sense to which the large humanity of Christ appeals. But these are but

few in comparison with those whose humanity has been choked and effaced, and whose "views," therefore, made just as hard and narrow, by worldliness, or the pride of intellect. For these also the story of Nicodemus has its awful warning. You may demur that the analogy fails in any way to fit, and that neither the butterflies of Society nor the clever critics of Christianity ever came to Jesus, under shelter of night, to examine still further into the nature of a personality which, because of its purity and wisdom, seems to them to be somehow divine. But are you sure that this class does not exist—nay, that it is not very numerous? Are there not hundreds and thousands walking, with smiling faces, in the midst of us, who are uneasy because the world wearies them, and the cleverness of intellectual associates fails to satisfy them; and who, but for the fear of the contemptuous pity of their associates, would go to Jesus, and ask Him to resolve their doubts? They would fain come to Jesus "by night," because they fear the criticism of those with whom they move by day. And if they so venture, will not He make the same answer: "You must be born again, and then to you everything will become new. You must be born of water, the water of purification; you must recognise that sin is the one

defiler of human nature and the one blinder of its sight. And you must be born of the Spirit, receiving a new impulse and a new vision, which will mean a new life. Then, and then only, will these words, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, which in their metaphysical setting, and in the attempts of divines to define them, have seemed to you the least practical of theological subtleties, become to you the most precious, because the most practical, of realities." For it is only when a mystery is translated into life, into action, that it can be anything but a landscape to the blind and music to the deaf.

And this is why, we must suppose, the story of Nicodemus was chosen for the day that commemorates the highest mystery of our faith. Jesus does not expound to His perplexed disciple the mystery of the Trinity, though every Person in that Trinity appears in this short dialogue, as having part in the education of the human soul. Rather does Jesus imply the great fact, which I have just pointed to, that only through our earthly experience—that is, through the soul's experience here below, its sorrows, its needs, its struggles—are the mysteries of heaven to be fathomed. "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" This is



no exceptional doctrine, congenial to the mystical nature of the Evangelist ; it but summarises the fundamental law of religious apprehension, that theology is intelligible through life, and through life alone ; that the things of heaven are made credible by the things of earth. Happy are we, my brethren, if we so strive to look upon man and nature from the standpoint and with the eyes of Jesus Christ. When we see life and death, righteousness and sin, man, woman, and child, as He saw them, then, and only then, shall we grasp the vastness of the heavenly machinery, which it was needful for us to have, that we might be restored to the divine likeness, and finally to the things that God has prepared for them that love Him.

## V

# LIFE THROUGH THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.”—I JOHN iv. 9.

IN a new and remarkable weekly journal, the *Pilot*, a lady bearing a name closely connected both with theology and history in the latter part of this century,<sup>1</sup> has addressed a letter with the solemn question, or series of questions, to us of the clergy as to how far we seriously believe those so-called fundamental dogmas of Christianity—the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection—which we persist in assuming are never questioned by our hearers, but in which (she assures us) the educated laity have long since ceased to take any interest, because they have no longer any settled belief in them. It is indeed a solemn question, and one of incalculable importance. The writer asserts, with

<sup>1</sup> Preached 1st Sunday after Trinity, 1900.

perfect justice, that questions as to Ritual, or even as to the Higher Criticism applied to the authorship of the various books of the Bible, sink into insignificance compared with the question as to the alleged facts recorded in the Gospels, concerning the birth and death, the miraculous acts and claims of the Founder of our religion. It is impossible to evade the issue that the writer presents. If these facts are *not* facts but legends that have accreted round certain ordinary and everyday occurrences in the life of an eminent saint and enthusiast of righteousness, then we are bound to give them up, and to content ourselves with such facts as remain, and expound them, as far as we have insight and ability, towards raising the standard of conduct and character in those to whom we are ordained to minister.

For it is on these two things, as the sole end and aim of all religious teaching, that the writer lays stress. She recognises no other reason for religion but these. And she asks us frankly whether our personal experience confirms what we often declare so confidently, namely, that the *conduct* and *character* of those who accept such dogmas as the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, are, even in any small proportion, distinctly purer, loftier, more com-

plete, than is the case of those who honestly believe any other religion current in the world. "What it is important to learn," she says, "is not the number of converts made, but the alteration *in character* of those converted." "Is the change produced different in kind as well as in degree from that which is the result also of other creeds when as devoutly held?" On this point, the writer says, she would wish to have the honest opinion of "spiritually-minded educated men."

Yet on this head it is impossible to offer an opinion, without some further information from the inquirer as to the scope of her inquiry. Does it mean, "Is the average morality of the Christian believer higher than that of the average Buddhist or Mahometan?" Or does it mean, "Put side by side the most saintly Buddhist that ever lived, and the most saintly Christian, and decide which is the more eminent for saintliness"? For, of course, the thoughtful and serious propounder of the question knows as well as we, that in any religion that ever existed in the world, the number of those who, professing it, are profoundly moved by it on to a higher moral level than their neighbours is always a minority. In every religion self-interest and social pressure will very widely determine the standard of

conduct and the exhibition of character. It is impossible to answer the question here put, until it is taken back and amended.

But in the meantime it is open to us to take exception to what the writer assumes as an axiom of Christian belief, namely, that "conduct and character" comprehend all that the vast forces of Christian dogma were designed to promote and foster. The two words are not found in the English Bible, although the qualities which in combination constitute character and conduct are throughout exhibited and extolled, and are seen, in their perfection as we hold, in the person of Jesus Christ. Truthfulness, purity, charity, self-abnegation, these and kindred graces constitute unquestionably the perfect ideal of human character. But we have to notice that the language of Christ, and of those who carried on His teaching, on the subject of the necessity for Christ's intervention in the history of the world, is not precisely as represented by our opponent. Jesus, when He spoke of His object in coming into the world, never, I think, stated that it was simply to raise the standard of human conduct. The "*Cur Deus homo*"—the "*Cur Deus in cruce passus est*"—the "*Cur Deus resurrexit*"—are questions not answered so succinctly. The gift

and the grace of holiness is indeed a supreme gift, but holiness is regarded by Jesus Christ as itself the fruit of a yet more wondrous gift which He said He came to bring—the gift of life. He did not say, in bitter grief because of the repulse, “Ye will not come to me that ye might become good men and women.” He said, “Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.” The former would have been, we may say without irreverence, an utterly useless appeal. The publicans and sinners, the ignorant and the outcast, knew quite as well as Jesus that goodness was the right and the lovely thing, and that they had not found it, and could not find it. Had Jesus offered them “goodness” as the cure for all their ills, and their rest and comfort in the future, they would have looked up, poor hungry sheep, and not been fed. What He offered them was a gift antecedent to goodness—the gift of life. To tell them to be virtuous while they were as yet without life would have been the cruellest of mockery.

And it is of this same gift that the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who partook most of his Master’s spirit, speaks to us in to-day’s Epistle. “God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might *live* through Him.” In this, John does but repeat the language of his Master. It is no mystical

invention of his own. His brother apostle, St. Paul, uses the same language, and to him it is no metaphor—"Christ who is your life." It is as certain as anything can be that the substitution for "life" and "living" of such words as "morality," or "conduct," or "character," would not have satisfied the respective speakers—would not have conveyed their meaning. To have said that God sent His Son into the world that we might become more virtuous characters, would not have satisfied St. John. To have said that Christ was our *morality*, would not have satisfied St. Paul. Both these devout but most diverse personalities and geniuses wished for no gift for themselves and others more than the gift of holiness. But when they looked upon Christ as their example, their hearts failed within them; and they cried, "We know what is good and what is evil; the will is present with us, but the power is absent, miserable men that we are!" They wanted "life," whereas in themselves they felt they were lifeless.

There is no question whatever as to what Jesus Christ and His disciples meant by "life," although, in the teaching of many periods since, the word has been profaned and misconceived. Life, as used in the Bible for the boon brought by Jesus Christ to the soul, does not mean "existence"; neither does

it mean the continuance of existence hereafter. We are all familiar with some such explanation of the term as that "we should have ceased to exist when the body perished, had not Jesus, by His Atonement and His Resurrection, obtained for us the boon of living for ever, and living in eternal bliss." There are still, it may be feared, thousands of Christian believers who, if asked the meaning of "eternal life" as the result of Jesus' coming into the world, would reply that Christ had obtained for us a happiness that will endure for ever, after the death of the body. And if this were a true definition of "life," then indeed I should be heartily at one with those who argue that "character and conduct" are matters of infinitely more importance than eternal freedom from suffering, and that the prospect of never-ending enjoyment may coexist with very low ideals of character and conduct. If the dogmas on which the clergy are accused of laying a quite needless stress, have for their object mainly to reassure as regards the future happiness of the individual, then indeed I am in agreement with our opponent, that we may as well dismiss them for ever and turn our attention, however forlorn the hope, to raise without their help the average of private and public virtue to a far higher level than it ever seems to reach.



And this I take to be the conclusion to which this thoughtful writer would force us. "Is it worth while," the writer asks in effect, "to impose upon the laity dogmas in which they profoundly disbelieve, in order to obtain results, as to character and conduct, which all good men earnestly desire, but which, in fact, these dogmas no longer produce in any greater perfection than any other superstition current in the world?" No honest Christian can object to the form of this question. That a religion, from the very earliest days of its promulgation, must be judged by its results, Jesus Christ Himself was the first to declare. The tree, He said, must be content to be judged by its fruits. The life, the character, and the conduct of those disciples sent forth to convert the heathen were to be their warrant for the facts they were commissioned to proclaim. And what were these facts but those which are to-day found obsolete and useless? The only-begotten of the Father, it was declared, had come upon earth to save men from their worst evil—that which hindered them from the perfect condition called "life." He had come to make men aware of a tendency within themselves to evil—a tendency which He called the "sinful nature," which was enmity against God, whose nature and whose will was holiness and love. He

had come to awaken that passion for holiness which was dormant in every man, however defaced and overlaid by the crusts of long disobedience. He had come to awaken the sense of immortality by teaching that the soul of man was eternal as God is eternal, and that its possibilities for good, as also for evil, are not bounded by an existence of forty, sixty, or eighty years. And He taught, no doubt, that the acceptance of these facts would bring about such a change in men's ideas as to their place in the economy of spiritual being, as to make them practically new creatures—"born again"—born to new thoughts, new ideas, new hopes, new fears, new opportunities, new joys, new powers for good in the world in which they were placed to work out their salvation. And with these truths, and with the power to appreciate and adopt them, Jesus Christ Himself was so identified that He Himself called Himself the "Life" of man—the "Life" as well as the Way and the Truth. And the outcome of all this intricate machinery, of this mass of miracle and mystery, of all this portentous innovation upon the world's preconceived ideas, was that result, that simple result, called "conduct or character."

And doubtless it was the sight of this new type of character and conduct on the part of the first

missionaries which so profoundly impressed the imagination of the heathen, and drew them to the Gospel preached. Character generated character, but not alone by admiration, and the consequent impulse to imitation. It was as obvious to the earliest heathen as it should be obvious to us to-day that the new type of character exhibited by the Christians was inextricably bound up with the *facts* they preached—the *incidents* which we now call dogmas—the alleged facts of man's relationship to God in Christ. And yet a devout heathen in the first ages of the Church might surely with as much reason as to-day have objected, "Why tax the memory, the understanding, the credulity, of these poor people, by telling them that in order to be virtuous and innocent they must accept stories so strange, so repelling, as these you insist on their believing? Why have such dogmas any more virtue than attaches to the desire of any devout pagan to lead a life acceptable to his gods?" And this seems to be precisely the same reasoning as is addressed to us clergy in so many quarters to-day. The position has not changed merely through the lapse of centuries. And it is a position well worth our deepest consideration. In the progress of the Church's year we have reached the First Sunday after Trinity. We are leaving

behind us the mysteries and the miraculous incidents of Good Friday and Easter Day, of Whitsuntide and Trinity Sunday. We have come for a while, some of you will say, perhaps with a feeling of relief and satisfaction, to the end of *dogma*. For months to come we may forget these mysteries, and expatiate in the more congenial fields of character and conduct. We leave behind the things of little consequence; we embark upon the sea—doubtless a large and hazardous one, but still carrying us on to practical and definite results—of conduct and character: things of supreme importance. And how are we, your would-be teachers, to improve such occasion, to utilise such opportunities? Is it really sufficient for all your needs that we bid you, when you leave this temple of worship (where every prayer is the outcome of and based upon the discredited dogmas), to return to your homes, and at once become better members of a family, or of the State: better husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and neighbours, high-minded and patriotic citizens, unselfish, disinterested, self-sacrificing. How much better, how much simpler and easier all this, some will say, than to weary your intellects and mock your hopes with the subtleties of theology! Simple! easy! Alas! alas! are these things so? Is it ever simple and

easy to fulfil any one of these suggested articles of behaviour? Is it so easy to *be* (which is character) or to *do* (which is conduct)? Are the temptations of the world and of the lower nature in us one jot easier to resist because we have repudiated the story of the Gospel, and concentrated our attention upon conduct? Is it easier to navigate this vast ocean when we have rejected the compass we had, and when clouds cover the face of the heavens? I know indeed that we cannot, even though we wished, forgo those influences of Christ's Gospel which have been about us since our earliest childhood, and that it is possible for us, when we have ostentatiously turned our backs upon the sun, to imagine, and perhaps to plume ourselves, that we are therefore not walking, or seeing, by its light. One knows that though the sun that lit and warmed our childhood and even our later years has at last sunk below the horizon, there is an afterglow for a while, that will not let us wholly fall from our old ideals—

The mournful light  
That broods above the fallen sun  
And dwells in heaven half the night.

But we dare not trust to this, for there may follow another night, when the sun is wholly gone, when we may find ourselves "alone on the wide, wide sea."

"In this was manifested the love of God toward

us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might *live* through Him." The years come and go, and the centuries expire, and so much is changed, but the heart and conscience of man do not change. His worst enemies are the same as of old, his dangers as great, his temptations as overmastering, his inclination to fall down and worship any deity but the God revealed in Christ as deep-seated as of old. And still as of old it is life that he needs, not facts or instruction. And this life as offered by Jesus Christ is absolutely and indissolubly bound up with the revelation of the Triune God. It is bound up with the existence of a Father who loves His apostate children; a Redeemer who can reconcile those children with the divine Love; and a Holy Spirit, "a Power not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." We believe, and have seen no reason to change that belief, that the Christian type and standard of character are only intelligible, only conceivable, only pursuable, on the assumption of these divine facts; that apart from them the idea of "life" must dwindle into that of decencies and respectabilities, into conformity to a type of excellence which changes from age to age, which is as mobile and precarious as are the unruly wills and affections of sinful men.

## VI

### THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness overcame it not.”—JOHN i. 4, 5.

YOU will notice that I have ventured to change one word here from the translation in our Authorised Version, but the change is sanctioned by the Revised Version, and I think by the judgment of all our best scholars. The old version “comprehended it not,” in the sense of did not “recognise” or “accept it,” is indeed a possible meaning of the Greek word; but as, in the twelfth chapter of this Gospel and the 35th verse, the very same Greek word is used, and in the very same connection with “light,” there can be little doubt that the change I have adopted is allowable; for this last-named passage runs: “Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you”—lest, that is to say, darkness envelop and overcome you. The idea is

precisely the same in both cases. A conflict was originated through the coming of Jesus into the world, which was already in progress when He spoke these words; it is in progress still, and will never cease until He shall have subdued all things unto Himself—and this is the eternal conflict between Light and Darkness.

And when we see these two things placed thus together as “mighty opposites,” we cannot doubt what Jesus meant by light when He spoke of it, and what His servant John also meant by it. We are sure that they did not mean by light “Knowledge,” and by darkness “Ignorance.” With the page of the New Testament open before us, such confusion is impossible. For it was to the poor and humble and uneducated of the world that Jesus came to give light; and it was to show the scholars and divines of His day, that with all their scholarship and their learning they were too often without the light, and refused it when it was shown to them. I say that as long as we keep in close touch with the teaching of Jesus, we cannot mistake His meaning. But it is otherwise when, having parted company with that teaching, we fall into the world’s habit of using “light” and “darkness” with worldly meanings. In the language of every day,



“enlightened” does not always bear a significance that Jesus would have approved. It contracts, does it not, a meaning all but purely intellectual? If we say to some friend, or perhaps some opponent, “Permit us to enlighten you on this matter,” we mean, in nine cases out of ten, that we will supply some fresh knowledge, or some new explanation that will “throw light,” as we call it, on the subject under consideration. It is an intellectual enlightenment, through the advent of fresh knowledge, that we are proposing. And this use of “light” and “enlightenment” becomes so common with us that unless the words and character of Jesus Christ are ever present to raise and amend our estimates of “light,” we may too easily relapse into the Pharisaic estimate of it, which was just what Jesus came to remove. Our devout and noble Missionary Societies sometimes issue maps of the world’s surface, in which the vast continents as yet unreached by the Gospel of Christ are printed in darkest black, and Christendom, embracing all Europe, is left pure white by way of contrast. We are thus invited to survey and contrast the spaces of the world which are *enlightened* and those which are still lying in heathen darkness. And even here there dwells the subtle temptation to associate “light” with know-

ledge, and "darkness" with ignorance. And yet in the wonderful words of St. John that the Gospel for Christmas Day once more brings before us, it is not of Knowledge and of Ignorance that the Apostle speaks. It is not of what a man *knows*, but of what he *is*: not of his full acquaintance with every command and every new interpretation of the will of God, but of what such commands and such enlightenments of his intelligence have done for the learner, and made of him "a new creature." And thus of every so-called Christian land like our own, had we God's power to look into and read the heart of man, we might draw a map, marked off into black and white, separating those who have the light from those who have it not. But we cannot do this. We know that a land is called Christian and that its inhabitants perhaps pride themselves on their being a highly favoured land, but who shall say how many of those who have no excuse for not knowing the will of God, are striving to do it, and mourning that they do not do it better? This is a power denied to us, and we may be thankful to God that it is so, and that our own task and our own duties lie widely apart.

"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." You see that it is the natural bias in us all

to reverse this declaration of St. John and to read it thus, "The light was the life of men"; for this falls in with that disposition I have pointed to, to regard our enlightenment as our life: that is to say, our superior knowledge and intelligence and taste, as that which gives us our superiority over others, and our right to judge them and prescribe for them. All our intellectual pride and satisfaction with ourselves, all our intellectual scorn of other people, has its root in the idea that superior enlightenment is the fountain of a higher life. "I want to live my life," many a young man or young woman has cried, when they have fretted against a condition of mere service or duty to others. "We want to cultivate the talents that God has given us—the things that really distinguish us from the common everyday herd, among which we are at present doomed to live without making our mark. We want to let our light shine before men!" but the voice within them would forbid their carrying the quotation further, for it is intellectual light for which they crave, and they dare not add, "that men may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven."

My brethren, we all admire the character of Him who was born as upon this day. In no period of

the Christian faith has there ever been a more widely dispersed and more genuinely felt admiration and veneration for that character as a manifestation of the qualities that mark the highest development of divine goodness. We do—even those who hold themselves aloof from the other faiths and practices of the Christian religion, and who perhaps lament and despise the superstitions which, so they hold, are blent with it—we do all, I say, recognise that something higher than the world has ever learned elsewhere was revealed to us during those three years of labour and of suffering in the streets of Jerusalem, in the byways of Galilee. We confess the Light that thus dawned and grew to full splendour, to teach men what is best for human imitation. That is to say, we recognise the “Light” that has shone. But then it is possible for us to rest satisfied with our admiration and our veneration. As long as we remain content with the Light, what certainty is there for us that admiration will pass into imitation, and imitation into enthusiasm, and enthusiasm into that fellowship with the object of our veneration which is the meaning of the great word “life”? It is thus, I repeat, that we are seeking to reverse these words of St. John, and to say, “The light was the life of men”—instead of “The life

was the light." And this is no jugglery of words, no nice distinction of priests or metaphysicians. "Life" is a greater thing than "light," for life is light transmuted into action. Between light and life there may be yet a great gulf fixed, because the one vital step has yet to be taken. Light shows us things as they are, and separates the true from the false, the realities of heaven from the counterfeits of earth. Light shows us a beautiful picture—one painted with divine truth and in divine colours—but it remains, or may remain, a mere picture, beautiful indeed, and by all men to be admired, until we have welcomed it and adopted it, and taken it to live within our own affections and our own conscience. It is the Pygmalion statue, cold and dead as stone, until we have fallen in love with it; then and only then it warms into life—a breathing, moving, energising source of all future life and growth for ourselves and for others.

Yes—"for others," and here again is shown one vital difference between life and light. Light, if it try to live alone, may serve only to separate us from our fellows. Light without love may make us feel only our difference from our brethren, and plunge us into something like intellectual scorn or, at best, social intolerance towards others. As long as the

word "enlightened" hovers about our paths, we have only half learned, indeed we are only on the path to learn, the meaning of the Gospel of Christ. For a great deal of love may lift the soul to heaven, though accompanied by very little light; whereas a great deal of light, with very little love, may leave the soul still in outer darkness. It is good to remember this, my brethren, on Christmas Day, when our oldest and most blessed associations with the season are bound up with the truth, that light cannot profit until it is transfigured into life—the life of pity, of tolerance, of generosity, and the deepening sense of responsibility for one's fellows. Cheap imitations of the true Christmas spirit have been long current among us, and have done the malignant work of all that is not true coin, in exciting almost a spirit of resentment among the so-called enlightened of Society against the once popular estimates of Christmas duties and privileges. We can only resist the cynical attitude towards Christmas so common among the superior classes, by turning to these words of St. John and taking from him (as he had received it from his Master) the essential meaning of Life. For that will best help us through all counterfeits of Christmas joy to use it to its eternal purpose of bringing all of us nearer

together in the only bond that can at the same time lift us nearer to God. And it is impossible that we should pass by to-day<sup>1</sup> the great reminder which Death has brought to us this week of what light can do for man when it has been exhibited to them as a divine force. The Head of our Church of England has been taken from us. It is too soon and there were no time to attempt an estimate of his many and great gifts; but not too soon to point to the qualities which made Frederick Temple to seem an ideal chief of ecclesiastics in the eyes of those who may not have been of his fold, though they were surely of his flock; and even beyond these, in the eyes of the so-named "man in the street," who may know and care little about ecclesiastical differences, but who recognises the great virtues that dignify man when exhibited on so lofty and conspicuous a field. Dr. Temple was never a party man, and therefore no party specially idolised him. This is the fate of all men who are early disgusted with the falsehood of extremes, and are keen to avoid them. But men of the temperament of Dr. Temple, and of his great predecessor in the Headmastership of Rugby, Thomas Arnold, have their compensation and their reward in the

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Christmas Day 1902.

vast and far-reaching influence they exert over the whole field of their country and their race. The "man in the street," though the phrase has sinister associations, and is often applied with a tinge of contempt, is in many ways no bad judge of such a character and such a faith as Frederick Temple's. He recognises courage when he sees it; devotion and self-sacrifice when he sees it; the aim that goes straight to its mark and never deviates because of praise or dispraise on either side; the aim that is sole and single, to proclaim the good news of Christ, and promote the salvation of the world. Such an one was Frederick Temple, and we will thank God for having given us such a shepherd of men, and pray that others may be raised up filled with the same spirit, and endowed with the same grace and wisdom from on high.



## VII

### LOVE AND SORROW

(ALL WORSHIP GROUNDED UPON THE CONVICTION  
AND CONFESSION OF SIN)

“Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God : for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil.”—JOEL ii. 13.

THIS is one of the sentences that preface our Morning and Evening Daily Prayer. These opening sentences, of which one or two are invariably read on Sundays, and have been read to-day, are so familiar, and pass so naturally for a mere form, an appropriate and easy way of introducing the prayers that are to follow, that they fall upon dull ears, for the most part. And just for that reason it is good from time to time to take them out of their context, and see what significance, what original meaning, there may have been in their filling the place assigned to them.

You will admit that, as I read this sentence just now, severed from its companion sentences, the words

had a sound appropriate to this season of Lent. But if you recall what the other sentences, its companions, are, you must admit that they are very Lenten also. "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." These are a few of them, and the remainder are like them in this, that they refer to one unvarying topic, Sin—its gravity, its importance, and the absolute need of our sorrow for it, and our repentance of it, and of a consequent reconciliation with God. There is a close and vital connection in the subject of all these detached sentences. They are no accidental assemblage of interesting religious sentiments on a great variety of subjects. They were chosen by the compilers of our Prayer Book with a meaning and a motive—and that meaning and motive was to strike the keynote, not of one particular season devoted to this subject, but of all devotion and all worship, in its manifold forms of prayer or praise or confession. These opening sentences, that perhaps we rarely trouble even to

listen to, declare to us the justification of all worship. Nay, they form indeed the foundation of all religion. And unless we have some conception of the meaning of sin, however weak, inadequate, and intermittent that sense may be, and is, in the hearts of the most serious among us, all that is built upon that foundation must be unintelligible.

Now, there is a religious attitude towards evil which is very different from the mere objection to it, and dislike of it, which every right-minded person entertains towards it. The prophet Joel, for instance, in company with all of the prophetic brotherhood, and all the Psalmists, and indeed all upholders of the truth and holiness of God in the Old Testament, speaks of sin as a thing to be mourned over, with bitter shame and tears. "Therefore also now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and mourning. Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God." And if we pass from the old world to the later one of Christianity we find no change in this respect. We still find sorrow for sin; strong crying and tears; going out and weeping bitterly when detected in ingratitude and cowardice; anguish of mind, finding vent in loud words of reproach and all but despair, at

discovering that the struggle against sin so often ends in our defeat. And these opening sentences of daily prayer not unnaturally reflect this religious experience, and remind us therein that such a feeling towards evil must be ours still. But so far from our all accepting the truth implied of sorrow for sin being at the foundation of any vital religion, are there not many who regard it, perhaps, as one side of religion, suited to the emotional, Oriental character, but one that it is late in the day to cultivate or keep alive as of absolute importance? One sometimes feels that there is a religion common among people, even people of a high-minded character, not lax in its conception of the sacredness of duty and the beauty of goodness, avowing honestly indeed a belief that morality is far more important than dogma, and capable of genuine admiration for things lovely and of good report ; which yet has lost in a great measure, what to religious men of old time was the natural and inevitable accompaniment of all this, a *loathing* of and *sorrowing* for that which is the opposite of these things. Admiration and praise for what is excellent seems to be surviving the capacity for mourning over and hating what is evil. Many in our day are bold to maintain that morality is not in danger, even if religion be given

up as incredible and obsolete. Now we as Christians are naturally and rightly accustomed to associate religion with a love and a devoted passion for the highest righteousness; and the persons just mentioned, though they refuse religion, still profess so far to agree with us as to have an undiminished admiration and belief in what is excellent. So far they appear to be on our side. Their gospel is the "beauty of goodness," and they freely preach it. They retain at least so much of religion as to admire what is good. They seem to believe that they can live by admiration. But this is but a maimed and partial view of the ends at which religion aims. The end and aim of religion is not to *admire* what is highest, but to *love* what is highest. And these are very different things. Admiration may mean only standing still; it is the attitude of watching, comparing, cultivating a taste. It is an æsthetic quality, not a moral, still less a spiritual. Love is an ardent desire to attain and to possess: it is not a standing still, but a pressing on; not only a stretching forth the hands "*ripae ulterioris amore*," but an urging forward of the steps, struggling and weary, but not hopeless, towards that beloved, much longed-for shore. There is no necessary instinct of progress in admiration, and therefore no necessary sorrow at

non-attainment. It is possible to admire what is ethically beautiful, as something quite outside of ourselves. We may come to find the greatest interest and pleasure in watching the instances of it, and analysing and criticising it, and the varieties of it, as it passes like a moving panorama before our eyes, and yet never have awakened in us the conviction that to be responsive to this admiration in ourselves, to wish to attain it, is the motive to which religion appeals, and by which it expects to be recognised. To admire goodness does not help us to be good, nor is it any substitute for goodness. Rather the two things may be in absolute antagonism. St. Paul indeed put the antagonism into a shape which every man since has understood, so far as he has ever striven to realise the ideal he has admired in others. "The good that I would I do not. . . . I delight in the law of God after the inward man : but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

This is the point, this brings to the real issue the differences between a self-satisfied admiration of what is excellent, and a self-*dissatisfied* struggle to bring one's own unruly will and affections into harmony with it. It is not a difference of degree,

but a difference of entire kind. The person who admires goodness and the person who loves it are not merely at different stages of progress on the road to God. The one is not necessarily on the road at all; the other, with whatever deepening sense of unworthiness and failure, and the far distance of the goal, and the ever-lengthening way he has to travel, is on that road, and therein is his compensation and his never-failing comfort. Think of the way in which the great grace of Love, or Charity, is treated by men so different as St. Paul and St. John. That Love, which has been so often diluted away into mere cheap and worthless sentiment, is the subject of these men's enthusiastic praise just because it is as remote as possible from a mere sentiment; because, on the contrary, it is a real power and an impulse; no mere admiration of goodness, but a longing, a yearning after it, a discontent that will never be appeased but by the obtaining the thing descried and admired. It is admiration that may be, and remain, a sentiment and a luxury. Love is a being drawn towards the thing loved, with a desire to resemble it and to be absorbed into it; and with this is of necessity bound up a grief, a pain, a shame at one's own unworthiness, a sense of guilt at not being responsive to the nature

that wills so lovingly towards us. And thus it is that the weakening sense of sin, which I began by noticing, is a natural result of the substitution of a mere approval of what is noble, great, and good, for a love for it.

“Therefore also, now, saith the Lord, Turn ye even to me with all your heart”—that is *Love*. But the Prophet goes on, “and with fasting, and weeping, and mourning.” That is *Sorrow*—sorrow for having been so unloving; sorrow for sin. This sorrow would appear to be one of those things that forms an essential part of religion, as the Bible unfolds to us religion; and a religion without love is religion without sorrow. Now, the notion that anything is to be gained by being sorry for that which is amiss in us is palpably going out of favour. A cheerful religion is a more popular type than a sorrowful one. “Forgetting the things that are behind,” is a counsel of the Apostle’s that falls upon willing ears, which too easily overlook that he was only speaking of past failures which might, if overmuch dwelt upon, discourage us as to future success; and perhaps of the danger, as our homely proverb has it, of “crying over spilt milk”—of brooding over what is gone, and hopeless, instead of looking at that which is still ours, and still irradiated by that light of Hope



which it is God's will should never be extinct. Well, the homely proverb has a precious lesson for us. It is idle to "cry over spilt milk," but it is a perilous conclusion to draw from this, that there is not a weeping and mourning that may yet be the very condition of any real spiritual life. We are not to mourn too much over what is past, irremediable, and irrecoverable ; but we are to mourn over that in us which produced all that was regrettable in the past ; all that is regrettable in the present ; and to a certainty, save for the love of God working in our hearts, will produce all that we shall have most to regret in the time that lies before us, "in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment." This is the delusion, so easily fallen into, and fostered, that holds so many of us bound : this confusion between the sorrow that is useless and paralysing to the powers within us, and that which is useful and the starting-point of new life. "He that lacks time to mourn, lacks time to mend." It is a dominant will, something that still lives, though perverse, unruly, and sluggish, that we are to mourn and weep for. *Ourselves*, not our fruit in the past, a past now beyond human reach, we are to mourn over. And if we cease to mourn, or have never even learned how to mourn, religion is impossible, because it is meaningless.

And one result from this, or perhaps symptom of it, is that other delusion that evil in other people is to be looked on with equanimity, as something belonging to the race, something inevitable, and therefore, though working disorder and many other painful things, is to be taken as unavoidable, as part of the ordained discipline of the universe. "Death can not be an evil" some philosopher (was it Goethe?) said, "for it is universal." This is not the religious aspect of death, which is that death is an evil—the fruit of evil—and the crowning mark of man's fall and of the curse under which we and the whole universe still groan. But it is a seductive doctrine; and it is no great distance from that to a doctrine, accepted in too many minds, perhaps, though they shrink from putting it into words—that what theologians call "sin" is no evil either, seeing that it also is universal. There is a great deal of that spurious charity abroad which consists in not taking harsh views of sin or crime; and so judging because these things are so general. To treat crime or sin rather as a disease or weakness than as what religion calls it; to think of the hospital as the only proper cure for that which religion thinks deserves punishment, as part of its expiation;—those who hold these opinions flatter themselves, I think, that

they are more far-seeing and therefore more truly charitable than those who take the old-fashioned view. But it is well worth watching carefully to see if it may not mean something that is neither wise nor charitable, an inadequate sense of the awfulness, the deadliness, and the certain results attaching to evil in the soul of man ; a quite inadequate sense of what the Bible calls the "exceeding sinfulness of sin." And it is good to watch also, and that not through judging our neighbour, but by examining our own hearts, whether at the root of such opinions there does not lie the weakening sense of the importance and the far-reaching consequences of evil in ourselves. It is a very mischievous abuse of charity, that which tolerates evil on the ground that we ourselves also are sinful, and as such have no right to condemn. The same clear-thinking but conscienceless nature who made the remark just cited as to the universality of death, is reported to have said, "Age makes one tolerant. I see no faults committed by others that I have not committed myself." Plausible and fine-sounding doctrine ! but pagan, and savouring not of the wisdom that makes men love righteousness. The tolerance that leads us to be more and more satisfied to remain as we are in moral attainment is no true tolerance, no

true charity. Years should indeed bring us the "philosophic mind," but this is not even true philosophy. No man who really hated evil, no man who really sorrowed over sin, no man who really understood the true and divine meaning of the beautiful lines :—

Who ne'er his bread in sorrow ate,  
 Who ne'er, the weary midnight hours,  
 Weeping upon his bed hath sate,  
 He knows you not, ye Heavenly Powers :<sup>1</sup>—

no man, I repeat, who had ever felt the thoughts that these lines awaken in the breasts of the follower of Jesus, could have a toleration of evil on the ground of its universality, still less on the ground that he himself shared the liability, and therefore the degradation. Those who are most aware of what sin is in themselves, those who feel it as a part of themselves that clings to them, eating into their very flesh and bones, their heart and mind, will hate it most, sorrow for it most, in themselves as in other people. They will indeed be more truly tolerant of others ; because they are all alike guilty, all alike miserable ; and most surely not because they are all alike the subject of an epidemic, which must be borne and made the best of.

<sup>1</sup> From *Wilhelm Meister*.

Love and Sorrow—these two emotions, or rather, since emotion may be sentimental and evanescent, these two *upward impulses*—these are the two things as to the reality of which within us we should at the opening of this most solemn week<sup>1</sup> endeavour to make sure. We are told by many that Sin is a figment of divines; that it is a selfish thing; concentrating a man's attention upon himself, whereas he wants it all to enable him to look outside himself, and devote himself to the healthier, the more useful, task of healing the diseases of the body politic. It seems as difficult to answer such persons as to explain the colour of flowers to those who are colour-blind; to explain the melody of Mozart or Schubert to those who are music-deaf. One is inclined to feel helpless in their presence, and perhaps to indulge a feeling of wonder whether for such a state of things people are responsible, any more than they are for natural defects of eye and ear. But there may be another lack, other than this particular one, from which such people suffer. Have they ever loved and have they ever sorrowed? Have they, that is to say, ever been filled with any enthusiasm for what is above themselves and beyond their attainment? If not, the sense of sin will be

<sup>1</sup> Preached the Sunday before Easter.

for ever non-existent. Only the deep admiration of the character of God, as revealed in Christ, can awaken the perception of what is highest and best, of what we ought to be and are not. Only the apprehension of One who suffered everything that He might seek and find us, and restore us to our rightful condition, will shock us out of our self-content into bitter self-dissatisfaction. At the opening of this holy season, let us concentrate our thoughts on these two things. Have we ever learned to love; have we ever learned to sorrow; or, having known what these things mean, have the lusts and pleasures of the world "crowded them out," so that we know them no more? If so, the remedy is not to look continually into ourselves, analysing and weighing, and wondering why we are not this and that. Let us look outside ourselves at the Person who can alone win our highest love and awaken our deepest regret. Love and sorrow in us must have their awakening, from the contemplation of the same divine emotions in the Father who claims us. We must fetch our inspiration from above us, not from within. "We love Him, because He first loved us." We cannot sorrow for sin, until we have first understood all that is involved in *His* mourning for it.

See! from His head, His hands, His feet,  
*Sorrow and love* flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Our sorrow and our love must be the reflection of  
His, and the response to His.

## VIII

### THE DECAY OF WORSHIP

“ And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy ; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.”—  
LUKE xxiv. 52, 53.

THE word “worship” in connection with men’s attitude and demeanour towards Jesus is not at all uncommon in the Gospel narratives. But in the incident before us, we meet with it for the first time, I think, as describing the deliberate act, we may add, the deliberate *religious* act of a number of persons, now for the first time beginning to realise the full divine nature of this earthly Master and Friend. During the preceding years of Christ’s earthly ministry He had received every expression of homage described by this same word. But for the most part those who are described as “worshipping Him” had come to Him, one by one, not to perform a religious act (as we commonly understand the term) but possessed by an urgent sense of need—a want,



for themselves, or for some one dear to them, which they believed Jesus alone could satisfy. The leper, the blind man, the woman of Canaan whose daughter was possessed by a devil, came to Him, with full assurance of His goodness and His power, and threw themselves upon this two-fold certainty. "They worshipped Him," so we are told; and we do not read that He rejected this homage. We may perhaps wonder at this, for these persons were presumably worshipping one whom as yet they believed to be a human being like themselves, although infinitely their superior, and entrusted with supernatural power. But Jesus did not reply, as the Apostle Peter did to Cornelius, "Stand up, I also am a man." He, who read all hearts, did not find anything of the superstitious, or the mercenary, or the merely official and conventional, in the attitude of these people. We are sure of this, because whenever He did so detect a spurious, a worthless, element in men's homage, He openly rebuked it. When the young man, on a memorable occasion, called Him "good," you remember how He repudiated the term, not because it was not true, but because in the mouth of him who used it, it was a mere phrase, a compliment, an official term of respect to a professional teacher. And so He rejoined, "Why callest thou me good?" in order to throw His

questioner upon a higher source of wisdom and righteousness, that he had been too long neglecting. So again, whenever His ears caught the sound of unreality, or emotionalism, or a purely mercenary view of the Divine, as that which could confer favours, He resented homage ; but He welcomed it when it was the child of humility and of gratitude. And He thereby from the beginning set His seal upon the true significance and virtue of worship. Worship may be a true thing, and therefore acceptable to God, although it accompanies much ignorance of the full nature and attributes of the object worshipped. On the other hand, it may be a worthless thing, though offered by one living in the fullest light of the most complete revelation, if its motive is either superstitious or unreal. "God is a Spirit : and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." When therefore Jesus saw people coming to Him in that true spirit of worship, although they were yet far from understanding that He was one with the Father, He accepted that worship ; for it meant, as I have said, humility, faith, and gratitude.

And it is interesting to note this, and to note by the side of it, that the disciples, and especially the Twelve who were closest to Him, and in His fullest,

deepest confidence, did not witness to their trust in Him and their fuller knowledge of Him in the same sort of way in the period preceding His death, resurrection, and ascension. It seems a strange thing to say, but they knew Him too well, they were too much in His deepest confidence, to worship Him ; even though He spake as never man spake ; as one who spake with authority and not as the scribes ; though they loved Him as they had never loved man, and felt that He had saved them, as none other could have saved them. But just because they listened to His words, gradually unfolding to them His true nature—letting them learn, as they were fit to receive them, the perfect truth as to Himself—just because of this, they did not worship Him until their knowledge was made perfect. Before they learned the full truth of His divinity, they would have been afraid to worship Him, lest they should have been placing a man, however good, above the Father in heaven. But when the shock and disillusion of the death had been turned to glorious hope by the resurrection ; when the resurrection, with all those incidents we read of in the Gospels, brought a crowning interpretation to all that had gone before ; when the body of the resurrection passed from earth to its eternal home in Heaven,—

then at last the homage they had paid for the past few years ripened from homage into worship. "And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

But I am not distinguishing between this worship, the worship of a completed knowledge, and that other worship I have referred to, the worship of the ignorant blind man and the leper, who knew this only, that the mysterious figure before them was good and merciful. The degrees of the worshippers' knowledge were different indeed; but the virtue of their worship and its spirit were the same. And both were therefore, we are assured, acceptable to the Father. Both had seen God's goodness incarnate, and both had been drawn to believe in it and to throw themselves upon it. This is the essence of all true worship, and it is on this that we do well from time to time to fix our thoughts, for it is certain that on our right understanding of what worship is, will depend, not only the good we get from it, but the very continuance and existence of worship among us, as a religious act and duty. From time to time, as at the present moment, we hear ominous complaints or laments that the habit of worship is beginning to die out; that men, and especially young men, and notably young men of

reading and culture, are more and more neglecting the practice,—that the habit indeed continued as long as there was a powerful public opinion requiring or approving it, but that that very public opinion is now ceasing to operate. One cannot gainsay these complaints altogether. There is too large an element of truth in them. But those who notice and lament the fact are little agreed as to the supposed causes. The fault, you will have noticed, is almost always assigned to the details, or the machinery of public worship. Services are too long or too short; too dull and colourless, or too bright and overlaid with ornament; the sermon is dull, and does not attract; or it is too alluring, and throws the prayers into the background,—these and many more explanations are forthcoming, dictated, as could hardly be otherwise, by the peculiar tastes and predilections of the objector. They are only agreed that whatever the cause, those who once followed a habit have begun “with one consent to make excuse.” But it seems strange that other and more serious reasons for the change should not have oftener suggested themselves. If the root-idea of worship be the same and unchangeable; if the essence of the thing be still as ever humility, faith, and gratitude, the sense of need and the belief that there is One who can supply that need;

then, if this meaning has evaporated out of worship, or, worse still, out of the hearts of men, is any other experience to be looked for than that a custom, requiring under any circumstances a certain sacrifice of time, and self-denial in many other forms, should show signs of decay? For it is an eternal truth, subject to no exception, that no custom can endure, at least without becoming corrupt, out of which the meaning and the force it sprung from have departed. Least of all, may I not add, in this Church should that truth need stating? For the very building in which we worship tells us of a once powerful religious Order, which came to decay when the purpose of its establishment had ceased—when it had survived that purpose, and become of the world, worldly. It is not difficult to us to realise this truth when so presented. But it is more necessary to bear in mind that the law still holds; that not in the far-off middle ages only, but at the close of the nineteenth century, it is unsleeping in its action, and that the religion of to-day, blended though it be with so much that is new and fresh, is subject to it still, and that where, out of men's or women's religion, the salt of reality and of spirituality has departed, then the religion has lost its savour, and is only fit to be cast forth as worthless. The habits engendered by the religion,

while it still retained this salt in it, may endure for a long time. The impetus of tradition ; of old association ; of tender and pathetic memories,—these more worthy influences may help to keep habit alive ; the less worthy forces of respectability and policy may work to a like effect, but as long as these only are at work, the end though prolonged must come some day, unless the heart or the conscience of Society be stirred afresh by some unexpected revival, some flowing again of springs that seemed long dry.

And, my brethren, it is beyond all question to the drying up of these springs necessary to the vitality of religion, that the decay of worship is to be traced. The other things men fight about, dulness, absence of ritual, overplus of ritual, sermons, length of services,—these, by comparison with the instinct of worship or the sense of need, are the mere furniture or garniture of worship. Do not let us be afraid to face the true causes as they exist, and notably with our city churches and congregations, and wherever intellectual life is active, and questions of religion are freely discussed. Decay of worship, if it exists, means nothing else than a gradual change in the attitude of men towards God, and towards God as revealed in His Son, Jesus Christ.

The decay of worship means the decay of the conviction that we want something, vital to our lives as spiritual beings—something which God alone can give us, and which He requires that we shall obtain from Him alone, through a spiritual communion. "Ask and ye shall receive." It is that elementary teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, which we put idly by, perhaps, as food for babes, as an A B C we need no longer,—that elementary truism, which we are quietly ignoring! The necessity of asking in order that we may receive, this it is that is becoming one of the lost truths of the Bible. Only this! but how much it is, and how much hangs upon it! And this, observe, is to be noticed side by side with an almost daily increasing interest in the phenomenon, still by universal acknowledgment the paramount phenomenon in the world's development—the phenomenon of the appearance, the character, the teaching, the work of Jesus Christ. There are no signs of any weakening of interest in this marvellous topic. Let any new biographer of Him appear, any man showing insight and skill in bringing out new lessons from that life, and there will be no lack of hearers, in church or outside of it. It may be said that there is more admiration for Christ in the world than ever before. If Christ reappeared



on earth at this moment, "will He find admiration on the earth?" The answer is not unfavourable. But, to borrow His own searching and terrible question, will He find faith on the earth? The answer is not so sure. For admiration is not faith, and therefore it is not worship.

I am aware that this may fall, with something of a chilling blight, upon generous and noble natures who have clung, amid much distaste for metaphysics, and disgust with the wordy and often fruitless squabbles of theologians, to this admiration, genuine and deep, for the character of Christ, as one sure rock of safety and rock of defence in a world where there is so much that is unchristlike. And God forbid that we should put one stumbling-stone of demur in the way of those who with such a clue are feeling, blindly otherwise, among the labyrinths of the creeds. And yet I would appeal to the very testimony of such as these, as to whether my words do not point to a real blank, of which they have been conscious, in the religion of admiring wonder they have constructed for themselves. They have gone on hoping to receive from this steady admiration for Jesus of Nazareth something that it has not given them. It has given them enthusiasm for an ideal; it has not necessarily brought Christ into

their lives as a power. A recent writer in the newspapers has urged that young men have forsaken church because they have been fed there with theological dogmas instead of "moral advice." *Moral advice!* alas! my brethren, "moral advice" has more in it to disgust than to attract. We all know beforehand what the preacher would advise us to do, to be, and to think. We can "morally advise" ourselves, and go on all our lives without improvement! And the student of the life and character of Christ if he goes no farther is only, in fact, studying, with however generous and ardent an admiration, a system of moral and spiritual advice. But Jesus never spoke of Himself as if this was the chief purpose He was to serve in the ages that were to follow, when He should be no longer on earth. He surely encouraged all men to brood and meditate over Himself—His every word and deed. But He asked and expected something not more than, but different from, admiration, or the effort to imitate. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This is at once an appeal and a promise wholly different from even the propounding of an example. I appeal once more to the experience of those who, spurning the cobwebs of the theologian, have sought to find rest

in the devout contemplation of the perfections of Christ. Have they found it there? Have they not, on the contrary, been aware of a growing unrest, a deepening dissatisfaction, which is the deepest unrest, a sense of hopeless unharmony within them, between the thing they know they should be, and the thing they know they are? They have been trying, honestly trying, to know the real Christ without the intervention of the theologian; they have flattered themselves that in the placid face of Scripture they could see reflected the real Christ before it had been rippled, blurred, and made turbid by the conflict of the sects. And yet the clearness of the picture has not lifted from their souls a burden that lies heavily. It has added burdens, not taken them away. There is something in Christ's invitation that has not been supplied even by the homage to His excellence. The "Come unto me" rings in their ears, and they see in it something far, far more than "imitate me." The first will, nay must, include the second; but the second is impotent without the first. And if at last, in their weariness and despair, they throw themselves into the outstretched arms, they will know the difference between admiration and reconciliation; between homage and worship. For homage becomes worship

when once humility, gratitude, love, and the sense of helplessness and shame have once more entered into the long-deserted building. Then it is that the instinct of worship has its birth. And without this instinct of worship, the formal act must needs be dead—persevered in perhaps because there is always the hope that the riddles, which admiration has not cleared up, may yet be answered from some new quarter.

I think then that I am right in saying that the decaying of worship means a change in the general attitude of men to Christ—not to Him as a man, and the noblest of men, but as the satisfier of men's wants, the healer of their woes, the Saviour from their sins, the one source of their conquest over death. We cannot worship a *man*, even the highest, even the type and exemplar of the race. It has been lately put, with perfect truth, that "One man of a particular race and age cannot be the standard for all men, the judge of all men of all ages and races, the goal of human moral development, unless He is something more than one man among many" (Gore's *Bampton Lectures*, 1891, p. 25). It must be man, that is to say, who is something more than man: it must be the Man, crucified, but also risen and ascended, the Son who is one

with the Father, who is the fitting object of our worship.

My brethren, I do not mean that men are everywhere consciously changing their conception of the nature of God and Christ, and that they become aware accordingly that worship is inconsistent with their new position. But I do submit that it is idle to seek for causes of the neglect of public prayer and praise in the mere details of church ritual. If the instinct of devotion were in men, they would find or make an outlet for it, they would not "forsake altogether the assembling themselves together." But the instinct of devotion is the outcome, as I have said, of the sense of need—the wanting something which God alone can give, and which He has promised to give to them that ask Him. The sense of dependence upon God, and of fellowship with men in Him, is the very foundation of united worship. I am not afraid of the phrase just used that worship implies the wanting something. Let them who will retort that our worship is mercenary. They are welcome to the sneer. It was when men and women came to Jesus, in His earthly days, because they "wanted something" that He received them most gladly. But doubtless it depended on what they wanted. When the young

man, who had tried all that wealth and prosperity could give, but could not find peace or satisfaction, came asking for eternal life, though he was ignorant, obtuse, and could not reconcile himself to the required conditions, Jesus looking on him "loved him." But when men came because He could work miracles, and provide food, or because it seemed a wise thing to be "strong upon the stronger side," then He repelled them, with no show of gentleness. So now the criterion of acceptable worship is that we want something, greater, better, more blessed than this earth or this life can yield.

And lastly, let us beware of that new gospel which is so current now, the gospel by which they would fain be wiser than their Maker, and vaunt a morality higher than that of Christ. Let us beware of that arrogant altruism which says, "Never mind your own moral nature," devote yourself to the happiness of others. There are young men who are taught that they may abstain from worship, and expend their energies more profitably in helping their fellow-men. Refuse, my brethren, such a gospel altogether. Unless we know what is best for our own selves, we cannot know what is best for others. We cannot teach others what we have never ourselves learned. If Christ is still the only

refuge for the world ; the only power, inspiration, and righteousness for the world ; we cannot commend, because we cannot reflect, to others, this only Salvation, unless we are pursuing it for ourselves, unless we are keeping in contact with it, drawing from it daily and hourly its vital inspiration.

## IX

### THE VASTNESS OF THE UNIVERSE

#### ITS EFFECT UPON THE RELIGIOUS INSTINCT IN ANCIENT TIMES AND IN THE PRESENT

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.”—JOB xxxviii. 4.

THE glory of God in creation is the subject on which we are led to dwell by the scripture appointed for Septuagesima: the “first heaven and the first earth” as described in the opening chapters of Genesis; and the “new heaven and the new earth” as witnessed in vision by the evangelist St. John. And to these portions of Scripture there has been added (we must admit, with wonderful felicity of judgment) that passage from the Book of Job in which the Almighty is represented as reproving His servant’s rash criticising upon the divine dealings, by turning his thoughts to the wonder and the vastness of the universe. According to the summary



given at the head of this chapter, in our Authorised Version, "God, by His mighty works, convinceth Job of ignorance and imbecility," which latter word we may interpret as meaning "feebleness" and "helplessness." Job, as well as his three friends, had been freely dogmatising upon the meaning of God's judgments, and the right and wrong, the justice and injustice, of human suffering. The three friends had agreed that suffering was only inflicted as a direct punishment for transgressions, and that therefore Job's alleged righteousness could not be genuine. Job, on the other hand, had clung to the assertion of his innocence. His misconceptions of the divine government lay therefore in another direction. As he trusted, and rightly trusted, that he had loved and served God with all his heart, with all his power, his misery lay in having no alternative explanation of the mystery of suffering. If he was being punished for past transgressions, then his punishment might be hard to bear, but it was at least logical, it was intelligible. But as this was not so, he was miserable, and the more miserable that his suffering was unexplained. And this state of mind, if it is not rebellious, is akin to rebellion. For it, in effect, accuses the Almighty of arbitrariness and caprice. "I am being punished for

nothing" is a severer charge against the inflicter of the punishment than to say, "I am punished for my sin."

It is at this stage of the argument that the voice of the Almighty intervenes to declare that the sufferer, though he is not guilty of the dogmatic blasphemy of his three comforters, who claim to be perfectly well acquainted with all the secrets of the divine mind, is yet on the verge of yielding to a blasphemy of another kind. For to assume that God's ways towards man have no meaning, no virtue, is as fatal to our highest good as to construct a meaning and a virtue out of our own dark and narrow views of what is just and unjust. Job was satisfied that his friends' arguments were all wrong, and he was justified in so believing; but he was still haunted with the doubt whether the "Judge of the whole earth" was not doing, in his case, something the reverse of right. In this he was "presumptuous," because he was judging God without possessing, or its being possible that he should possess, the materials for judging.

Now the method by which Jehovah is represented as convicting His creature of presumption is briefly this. He does not satisfy the human sufferer's questioning and perplexities as that sufferer expected

they would be answered. He unfolds before him the immensities and the wonders of the universe, and asks him whether he can understand these, or enter into the secret of their origin and creation; and if not, why he should expect to understand the mystery of God's dealings with man. The question is never put in this exact form, but it is left to suggest itself in the mind of the creature. Job is asked if he can explain the origin and method of the world of animate and inanimate things that he sees around him. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner-stone thereof; when the morning-stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" You will recall the sequence of questions, clad in the noblest imagery of the poet, that followed these opening words of this chapter. And the meaning of the questions, as bearing on Job's distress of mind, is that which I have just indicated. If you cannot guess even the secret of life, or matter, or the times and seasons, the order of Nature or her laws, forbear to dogmatise upon the meaning, the cause, and the purpose of human

discipline. "Flower in the crannied wall," so our great modern poet has stated the problem—

I pluck you out of the crannies,  
 I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
 Little flower—but *if* I could understand  
 What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
 I should know what God and man is.

It is the problem that so nearly wrecked the life and salvation of Job. Until he could understand the "flower in the crannied wall," he could not understand the mysteries of God and man. And the conclusion of the whole matter was, "Be humble because thou canst not know." And this, you will remember, was the actual effect of the rebuke upon Job. When Jehovah had finished speaking, Job surrendered. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile: what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth."

The scene of this wondrous narrative belongs to a period separated from us, on any reckoning, by thirty centuries or more. The old problems survive unchanged to this day, and the mystery of evil and of pain is no less of a mystery than to the "man of Uz." We have to pass through the same bitter experience of wonder, perplexity, doubt, and too often of complaint and rebellion, that Job passed

through. We cannot tell why we suffer ; or (what to many of us is a far more bitter trial of our faith) why others suffer, when we ourselves perhaps are prosperous and in health. For ~~I believe~~ that this latter mystery haunts the imagination and chills the faith of many earnest thinkers in the world, far more than the pain or adversity that befalls themselves. For one's own suffering brings many comforts with it, and throws many a side-light upon itself, reveals many uses, privileges, and blessings, unsuspected before it came. But when we reflect upon the misery and the suffering of whole nations, or classes of society, from whom we are too remote in circumstances for us to guess how suffering acts upon them morally, it is then, ~~I believe~~, that we are most liable to have our faith in a God of mercy shaken. The vast, vague, unexplored region of poverty, domestic misery, and all the suffering that flows from the laws of nature and man consciously or unconsciously violated, this, perhaps, lying all around us in the world, brings home to us with terrible force the mysteries of divine government, and tempts us to "curse God and die," more even than the calamities that befall ourselves. To a man whose heart has been made tender by familiar association with the spirit of a more perfect revelation of God than was

vouchsafed to Job, the sufferings of those of whom he knows little or nothing is a harder problem than his own. The area of our perplexity is widened with the growing area of our outlook upon human life. Even though we are free from the exasperating effect of three such misleading counsellors as were Job's, we have, on the other hand, a larger stock of mysteries to face. The problem of divine government has to be worked out upon a far larger area than the small field of our own personal welfare or disaster. But the answer that was given to Job, if it satisfied his doubts and removed his misgivings, is still the answer to our wider range of difficulty. Still, if we cannot understand the mysteries of the world's origin and arrangement, how dare we pronounce on the mystery of pain?

But there are some of us, it must be feared, to whom the divine answer to Job carries no weight and brings no comfort. If the burden of the whole world's sufferings seems harder to understand and to bear, the added sense of the vastness of the universe is not found, by some of us at least, to supply a proportionate consolation. The telescope and the microscope have multiplied for us, indefinitely, the objects of the Almighty's care and love. But the thoughts that would naturally be expected to arise

in us, keeping pace with this increasing insight into the vast and the minute worlds included in creative power—the feelings of deepening awe and wonder—do not seem to generate an increase of humility in certain minds. Or, if an idea of humility is generated in such minds by contemplating the vastness of the universe, it is not of a kind that brings God nearer to the creature, but removes Him farther off. There is an idea which may easily be mistaken by us for humility, but which it is really fatal to confuse with it, I mean a sense of our *insignificance*. Job, we are told, was “humbled” by being reminded of the immensity of the works of Him whom he had been tempted to judge. But some of us, who have shared Job’s perplexities, when we are called upon to look up at the immensities, go on to learn a quite different lesson, and the farther science enables us to look into the wonder and the greatness, the more “insignificant” do we seem to ourselves as likely to be in the sight of God. And this tendency is of course increased by the awful possibility that had never entered into the mind of man in Job’s day to conceive, that our little world of men is not the only one, but that the heavens are studded with worlds, conceivably peopled by beings having moral and spiritual natures, created

also in God's image, and partaking His love and undying interest. There have been those whose former happy faith has been shipwrecked upon this very discovery. They could believe that Christ might have come to earth to die for man's salvation if *this world were all*, but when once it has become a grand possibility that there are other worlds of sinning and suffering humanity, the old glory and comfort of their religion seems to fade and fail. "Why did God take the nature of beings on this earth," they ask, "when millions of worlds must be inhabited with other beings, whose longings, like our own, must be to know God and to be like Him? If the Incarnation was needed for the perfection of man's nature, why not for that of dwellers in other worlds?" This is one form of religious distress and distrust which not only the frivolous, or those who are fretting against the restraints of religion, but earnest and God-fearing persons are liable to. But it is not the commonest result that flows from the larger outlook which science and speculation have made familiar to men six thousand years after Job doubted, and struggled, and repented. The unconscious effect of it upon thousands, who have no deep moral affection for Christianity to make them wish it true, is to make the world, and man, and



therefore their individual selves, to appear less important in the universe. The value of the world they live in, which might have seemed great if it had the monopoly of a Creator's care, almost disappears to them when once it is diluted by admixture with myriads of other worlds, no more and no less related and responsible to the Author of the universe. Such persons as these take shelter, accordingly, in their "insignificance." And there are not lacking signs that they regard this new conviction as somehow creditable to them. It has a distant resemblance, at least, to a grace which all agree to revere, the grace of humility. But, my brethren, it is not humility. The Devil provides excellent imitations of almost all the Christian virtues, and the assertion of one's insignificance is his counterfeit of this grace. There is no humility, but only a "pride that apes humility," in disclaiming the being important enough to engage the divine sympathy, occupy the divine thoughts, and receive the divine help and blessing in this world and in another. If that astonishing history, the Book of Job, had taught us no other lessons of infinite value, this alone should engage our eternal gratitude, that it employs the overpowering mysteries of creative energy to show man his need of humility, but by

no means to impress upon him his insignificance. The very existence of the Book of Job, its very title, sets forth this mighty fact. The book deals with the immensities of nature: that chapter we have read to-day, and those that follow it, are full of the mystery and splendour of that nature, animate and inanimate, that forms the background and the setting of the creature man. But vast and powerful as it is—its bulk, to annihilate his body; its mystery, to crush mind and heart—there is nothing in it that can rival the spirit of man, made in the image of the perfect God; nothing in it that can annihilate the soul. Job, bowed down in shame and penitence by the Almighty's declaration of His power and resource, is yet a greater being than aught in that creation beside. Job is humbled at last, but he is not humbled by contrast with the starry heavens, and the awfulnesses and splendours of mountain and valley, of tempest and rainbow,—he is humbled in the presence of God, and that humility, because it is the humility of moral and spiritual uplook, makes him "a little lower than the angels" although in the depths of pain, and sorrow, and solitude of heart. Humility lifts man to God, and therefore makes him truly great. The sense of insignificance depresses him to earth, and by touching earth (unlike Antæus)

we gain not strength, but feebleness, not dignity, but vileness.

It is, then, by being placed in our true relation with the will of God, as well as with His nature and character, that our spiritual well-being is secured. This is, briefly put, the whole lesson of the story of Job. And therefore it is also our true guide and refuge amid all those "riddles of this painful earth," the "something amiss" that is to be "unriddled by and by." The doubts and perplexities are as many, as deep, as bewildering as ever they were. Light has been thrown as the ages succeeded upon many once dark secrets of creation, but none upon the existence of evil, upon the freedom of the human will, upon the inequality of human fortunes and human opportunities, upon the necessity of pain and sorrow. We sit, too many of us, waiting for knowledge we shall never acquire and for light that, in the shape we demand, will never be vouchsafed. We strain our eyes to the horizon for evidence of that which lies at our own feet, or nowhere. It is on a small plot of ground, for many of the best and noblest of the servants of God a very small plot indeed, that the battle of faith and sense has to be fought out, and the problems of God and man mastered and turned to profit. We few of us

willingly believe this. We are constantly being reminded by those who call us narrow and bigoted and ignorant that we have no justification for our faith unless we have gone out to battle with all the human assailants of that faith, and vanquished them one by one. We have no right, we are told, to hold this doctrine unless we have studied this science, read the books of that thinker, examined the argument of that latest pamphleteer; and if you refuse to take this advice, you will be taunted with cowardice, and illiberality, and all sorts of evil qualities. You will be accused of avoiding the real difficulties of your creed, from sheer indolence or cowardice. Never mind these charges; learn to disregard them. At least remember that were all these antagonists met and answered, the real difficulties of accepting the decrees of God, and doing His will, remain at home, and close to you, waiting also their turn to be met, and answered, and overcome. Never mind the charge of cowardice in not answering the arguments of the latest thinker, if you are fighting another and a better fight, against the arguments and discouragements of your own hard heart, dull conscience, rebellious will, and the dead weight of worldliness and discontent. We can but be fighting for the cause of God. Far better for

the battle to begin there, for sooner or later it has to be faced and fought upon the scanty plot of ground where our individual experience is cast.

“In His will stands our peace.” So might be summed up the moral of the story of Job. As long as God’s will was misinterpreted by the three friends there was no peace for them or for him; as long as it was resented by Job, though he did not attempt to account for it, there was no peace. When once he accepted the truth that God had His purpose, and that purpose to make perfect, through obedience, the curse was removed. When the sufferer was able, in effect, to cry, “Thy will be done,” his restoration to happiness had begun. But it needed the reminder of God’s greatness and power to bring this truth home to the sufferer. And I think, although we may flatter ourselves that we have outgrown the argument from God’s greatness as shown in material things, ~~that~~ we are surely in need of this same reminder. It is difficult not to feel ourselves greater than the person or the thing we criticise. To take a thing in our hands, and peer into it and classify it, is to be in great danger of imagining ourselves to be something far greater than it. It is difficult, increasingly so, to preserve the religious influence over us of the starry heavens and

the boundless mechanisms of nature. The study of nature is said ordinarily to lead of necessity to deep humility, to religious awe, but we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that if it has this effect with some, it has not with others. There is at least no fixed rule in the matter. What makes this awful difference between one man and another, that of two men looking up to the same heavens and round upon the same universe one is humble and reverent, and another conceited and unsolemnised?

The lesson taught by this scripture from the Book of Job, appointed for Septuagesima, is emphasised by the Epistle and Gospel, which have no obvious bearing upon the starry heavens; but they have upon that which the modern philosopher coupled with it as the most awful subject of human contemplation, "the moral law." "Know ye not," asks the Apostle Paul of the Corinthians, in the Epistle for this day, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest

that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." It is a good thing that we should be thus recalled from our voyages into the vast and the unknown, in our study of the divine, to the daily and hourly struggle against sin itself. Surely when we are tempted, gazing up at the boundless realms of space, filled, it may be, with sentient and suffering beings like ourselves, to ask "Lord, and what shall these men do?" it is well for us that we should hear the same answer as was returned to the like question of Peter when he asked as to the future of his companion—"What is that to thee? Follow thou me."

## X

### SUBJECT TO VANITY

“For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”—ROMANS viii. 20, 21. (R.V.)

THE English of St. Paul's Greek is always difficult ; and even when some of its obscurities are removed in our Revised Version, its necessary brevity almost inevitably prevents the full meaning of the original from being grasped. In the passage as I have read it, much is no doubt gained by the change of a single word : by the substitution of “creation” for “creature,” as the leading subject of the sentence. For by “the creature” we, in this stage of our language, would naturally understand the creature *man* ; whereas St. Paul is here distinguishing man from the whole earth and system of creative energy in the midst of which he is placed, to modify, or to be modified by. St. Paul begins by urging upon the



Christian flock, whose sufferings in person and circumstance there was no denying, that great as they were, they would sink into insignificance when the triumph should have been won, and good should have triumphed over evil ; when the true character and value of the sons of God (those, that is to say, who are filled and moved by the Spirit of God) should be vindicated before the world as exhibiting the true end for which man was created. And this, says St. Paul, is what all creation is earnestly expecting. For the whole creation lies under a spell of imperfection or of perverted use, connected, how we may not be able to discern, with the existence of sin which on earth is universal. As long as sin exists, unchecked, unrepented of, mankind must needs lie under this ban. But the whole arrangements of earth, considered as man's dwelling-place and field of probation, are bound up with the imperfections and degradations of man. Man, since Adam's fall brought sin into the world, "and all our woe," had been immeshed in the net of sin, fettered, hindered, and unable to escape. Mankind had been all these centuries groaning and travailing for deliverance. Even those who, like St. Paul and his fellow-Christians, were aware of their disease, and who had accepted God's proffered remedy, were not yet free from sin's

power. They were living in an infected world, and themselves struggling against the temptations it presented. "Even we ourselves," he says, "who have the first-fruits of the Spirit"—we, God's redeemed souls, have yet to wait for that final victory, the redemption of the body. And this universal struggle that is at work between the forces of God and those of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, not only mars and hinders the progress of *mankind* towards the goal set before it by their Maker. All creation shares the imperfection, the degradation of things human. The whole creation is under the spell, yearning for deliverance. The "entire creation," so it has been rendered by an eminent scholar of today, "the entire creation has shared, we know, until now in the sighs and throes of humanity."

Now, the first question that arises is, What did St. Paul mean by the "whole creation" as distinguished from man? This reference of his has been differently interpreted by thoughtful men, as also by the wayfaring man, though "a fool" in textual criticism or intellectual insight. Probably the popular idea of a suffering creation, as distinct from man, is of a world in which floods, fires, earthquakes, tornadoes, at intervals or habitually, scar the fair face of nature, and wreck millions of human lives. Or again, of a

world in which the tiger prowls, and the serpent stings, and where the big and strong of the animal world prey upon the weak ; where " Nature is one with rapine," where " the mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow speared by the shrike." My brethren, how far, or in what way, these pangs and apparent iniquities of Nature are connected with the wreck of man's primal innocence we cannot say, and we dare not dogmatise. God has revealed to us in His Word no glimpse of these things. Why the jungle is the jungle we cannot pronounce, and we are taught in the most solemn of all assurances, that the tens of thousands who perish by earthquake are not necessarily more sinners than those who live on the slopes of some fair English stream. But it is not necessary to fathom these mysteries in order to understand other mysteries, which are no less part of creation, and of which ourselves have habitual experience. For " all creation " is indeed a vast expression, and includes far, far more than the physical constituents of the globe on which we tread. Nor is it likely, so far as we know and understand the mind of St. Paul, that such things entered into his thoughts at all, when revolving the sad vicissitudes of things. When he spoke of " all creation " being expectant ; of its being subjected to vanity as the

necessary consequence of man's decadence ; of its waiting in hope that it shall itself be emancipated from its subjection to the law of servitude, and reach a liberty in harmony with that of God's redeemed children, it does not seem to us natural that the perils of inorganic nature, or even of organic, were in his mind. The words "made subject to vanity" make it surely certain that St. Paul had in mind all those things that are bound up with, or flow from, human imperfection. All human institutions, the "quicquid agunt homines" of the Roman satirist, the "votum, timor, ira, voluptas," everything which is in existence, conditioned by man's sin and infirmity, all things which should be real and are unreal ; which should be profitable and are unprofitable ; which should be successes but prove failures ; the things of which men boast, but of which they should be ashamed ; all things that are vain, because they promise what they cannot give ; and cannot give because they seek to be independent of that which is alone blessed, the supreme Good without which man's nature is starved and perishes. All these and an infinite number of other existing "imperfectnesses" which make up the sum of men's interests, faiths, hopes, fears, aspirations, all these are part of the order of things, or rather the disorder, traceable to the will and heart of man not

in unison with the will and heart of his Creator. All these things are waiting for deliverance from the curse that lies upon sin. Everything that exists which savours of humanity ; everything which affects humanity, and is affected in turn by it ; this seems to be in the Apostle's mind when he reflects how vast a field these things cover, and how the law of imperfection clings to them all, and makes the disorder which shall one day be at an end, when the universe itself is redeemed from the curse under which it lies.

“Subject to vanity.” This is how St. Paul expresses it. The world *is* “out of joint,” and though he knows that no one person was “born to set it right,” and that he himself, though prepared in the interests of Right to dash his life against the visible disorders and perish (as a little later he was called upon to do), can only be one of a little band whose influence to the world seemed as *nil*, yet he knows that the only hope for the world is in the influence of the few becoming in time the influence of the many, and so permeating and leavening the world of sinful men. The earthly order is subject to vanity. And what had the Apostle in mind when he uses the term, the Greek *ματαιότης*, thus translated ? Or rather, what had he not in mind ? for

the thing for which the word stands is boundless in its scope. It is the word by which the translators in the Septuagint render the thing by which the author of Ecclesiastes was most impressed. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." By a timely coincidence we have heard the same thing twice to-day<sup>1</sup> predicated of idolatry: once by Samuel in adjuring the Israelites—"Turn ye not aside," he says, "for then ye should go after *vain* things"; and once by St. Paul in rebuking the people of Lystra—"We preach unto you that ye should turn from these *vanities* unto the living God." In any attempt to define "vanity" these uses are of primary value: vain because unprofitable, and unprofitable because unreal. "Subject to unreality" is therefore an aspect of the Apostle's lesson. But indeed the term cannot be defined, for it is Protean in its nature. Vanity is Emptiness. That is its earliest synonym, and of this all the others are phases. When things which in our blindness we fancied full, and which in the bitter sequel we find to be empty, whatever were the things fulness of which we desired, herein is Vanity. Vanity is where we discover supposed reality to be illusion; where hope has to be exchanged for despair; anticipation for disappointment; imagined

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the fourth Sunday after Trinity.

good for realised evil. When we trust that things will last, and we find they will not last; when we imagine that we can rely on some support, and find that it will not bear the weight we have laid upon it, there is Vanity. Nor is it only on what is evil, or even on the trivial and the frivolous, that Vanity is found to be the final verdict. There may be vanity in what is good, when it is believed to be the *only* good, or the *highest* good. For there is in all of us the imperishable instinct that good is our proper goal, and in pursuit of it we set out in hope. "Because God is the beginning of our souls, and the Maker of them like unto Himself, this soul most greatly desires to return to Him. And as a pilgrim" (says the poet Dante, whose words I use) "who goes by a way he has never travelled, who believes every house he sees afar off to be his inn, and not finding it to be so, directs his belief to another, and so from house to house till he come to the inn, so our soul forthwith on entering upon the new and never-travelled road of this life directs its eyes to the goal of its highest good, and therefore believes whatever thing it sees that seems to have in it *any* good, to be *that!*"

Yes, it is most profoundly true that the crown of all disappointment is to find, perhaps at the very life's end, that the good we thought highest is not the

highest; and that the highest remains unenjoyed, unattained. And adding this final and saddest of all vanities to the other illusions, unrealities, failures of life, we are nearer to understanding, even from bitter experience, how all creation, so far as it forms part of man's discipline, so far as it tempts man, and offers what it cannot give, is subject to the law of vanity, is *the* source of the unreal and the illusive. It is not, as I have said, because of the hurricane and the earthquake and the flood that the earth is subject to vanity. We do not know enough of these things to judge. But this we know, that St. Paul was not speaking or thinking of men's bodies and wealth, of their earthly prosperity and comfort, but only of that which tends to separate them from God, Who made them, Who redeemed them, and to Whose likeness He yearns that they should return. He saw the universe, and to him the world and its inhabitants *were* the universe, lying under the spell of unreality and misapprehended good, and to him this, and this alone, was vanity.

And in a great part of Paul's estimate of vanity, doubtless the vast majority of men are in agreement with him, for their experience of life has taught them the same sad lesson. Our difference from him lies far elsewhere. It lies in the truths he deduced



from it, and in the impetus it gave to his own spiritual life, and in his efforts to call into being the same life in those he toiled for. For there are many ways in which the world of men accept a truth which they cannot deny, such as this of the necessary vanity of human wishes as well as of the things which evoke those wishes. The satirist is as well aware of it as the saint. A Juvenal and a Bunyan, an Augustine and an Omar Khayyám, confess the same sad human lot. But the satirist and the sentimentalist offer us little compensation, and still less of hope, in which to rejoice. Our earlier pessimists can only take refuge in the wine-cup and the roses, and cry, "How we would alter all this if we could!"

Ah Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then  
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

Our own famous chronicler of earth's *Vanity Fair* can only close the sad record with a sigh, "Ah! *Vanitas vanitatum!* which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire, or having it, is satisfied?" It is when we turn from such resignation to the inevitable to the words you have heard to-day:—"The creation was made subject to vanity," not of its own will, but because it was dragged into

the abyss of disorder opened by man's disobedience to his high trust; "The creation was made subject to vanity," but with the God-given hope that it shall one day be delivered "from the bondage of corruption" into the freedom and the independence that belong to the glory of being sons of God—of those, that is, who are led by the Spirit of God; it is, I say, when we turn to this mighty saying, this life-giving promise, that we realise why St. Paul dwells upon earth's failure and imperfection. He does it to inspire the sentient world of man to see and learn their real superiority, their real privilege, their real capacity for becoming more than conquerors of the powers brought against them by the world. The world, though it has no conscience and no audible voice, is yet crying out for deliverance, is yet "yearning for the triumph of righteousness." And who can gaze upon the world's surface at this moment, or even at any moment, without being forced to confess (whether we accept God's word for it or no) that it is lying under the curse of imperfection and of vanity? Everywhere the results of man's sin, his iniquities, his uncharitableness, his jealousies, his superstitions, and his blindness of mind and heart, are at work for ill upon the world, and the world in turn reacts upon mankind. Paul

saw the same thing, although his outlook upon the world of created being extended over but a small fraction of what meets our view. But he argued safely from what he saw to what he could not see, for he knew that the trail of the serpent was over it all. But over these evidences that he saw of imperfection he neither sentimentalised nor wept, nor became cynical or pessimistic, nor was even discouraged. That which made the cynic still more a cynic, or made the Epicurean return to his "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," made Paul only more keen to take up the weapons by which man can alone attain the victory. That which discouraged others gave him new heart; that which sunk others into apathy stirred within him the true spirit. He was "ever a fighter," and he knew that the only remedy against the vanity of the world lay in the fact that man was greater than all the rest of creation put together, because he was the temple of the divine Spirit, and a fellow-labourer with God. And this is the crowning lesson of this passage in his adjuration of the Roman Christians. He and they were waiting for deliverance, as well as the insentient world around them. But then they had "the first-fruits of the Spirit," and this made all the difference. There was no room left, no excuse left,

for apathy or despair, when God Himself was on their side. If they remembered this, life would indeed never cease to be a struggle, but then also it would never be without the sure and certain hope. And though the world of to-day is vaster, and the sight of its imperfection wider and more appalling, this remains and must remain the impetus of the Christian life. The forces of vanity seem vaster than ever, but the hope remains undimmed above us and within us, and by this hope, says the Apostle, "we are saved."

## XI

### THE FASHION OF THIS WORLD

“And be not fashioned according to this world : but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”—ROMANS xii. 2. (R. V.)

THE marginal reference here gives “age” as an alternative reading for “world”—“be not fashioned according to the age or time”—and it should not be overlooked that the Greek *αἰών*, here rendered “world,” does really mean the world, in special relation to *time*, as distinguished from “place” or “space.” The changing forms or fashions to which the Apostle here refers, are those which essentially belong to changes incident to time—the suppressed contrast being, of course, with a heavenly order, which is eternal. The idea is not necessarily theological : we are quite accustomed to the thought as a necessary consequent on our observations of life and history, and of the changes which every careful watcher of life must needs note in other

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people, and even in himself. / The "Time-Spirit"—the "Zeit-Geist"—is naturalised among us as a phrase to indicate the force which we see to be exercised, however little able we are to grasp and analyse it, in each succeeding epoch of our history. And it is clearly something after the same kind which St. Paul saw to be at work in the world of his day; and because his beloved converts must needs be in daily touch with the world, though it was their first duty and privilege to be not "of it," he had seen how necessary it was to them to beware of the subtle power, the alluring and plausible charm, which it was certain, unless they were forewarned and forearmed, to exercise over them. ) He knew (it was a knowledge he owed to his Lord and Master) that the spirit within a man must create its own outward forms. If he, Paul, could have been sure that the spirit of Christ, unmixed, uncontaminated, would reign supreme within the hearts of his disciples, he would not have feared for them that they would go astray. But he knew—as every earnest man knows from his own experience—that the world-spirit, or the time-spirit, is ever intruding into the sanctuary of our spiritual being, and there tempting us to the easier, the pleasanter, the more immediately rewarded service of that World which

is ever competing for us. And because of this, he implores his beloved ones to take the only course which can cut the ground, so to speak, from under that mighty competitor's feet. For this is the connection between the first and second verses of this chapter. St. Paul beseeches his brethren to dedicate their entire nature to God, for such dedication, he says, is their "reasonable service"; and then, but only then, will they be able to resist the counter-attractions of the world, for they will be *transformed* (changed from the "world's" fashion to God's eternal fashion) by the "renewing of their mind."

"The fashion of this world," says the Apostle elsewhere, "passeth away"—where he is, however, speaking of the "Cosmos"—the temporary nature of the created universe, rather than that of the habits, views, tastes, prejudices, and shifting standards of men. But the two ideas, if not identical, are parallel, and point to the same train of thought in the writer's mind. For that thought is, of course, of the necessarily changing and unstable nature of all that depends on the will of an imperfect being, such as a man—feeble of will, partial of knowledge, and ever warped and led astray by considerations of temporary advantage and interests. I have just

used the expression, "necessarily changing," perhaps because to our ears "fashion" inevitably suggests it; but this is only because, by a law familiar to all students of language, a word is sure to degrade when subjected to worldly handling. "Fashion" is, of course, merely "making"—and hence the form which results from such making. Our Authorised Version, so familiar to us, reads, "Be not conformed to this world," which is very faithful to the Greek original, though our revisers have, not infelicitously, substituted the word "fashioned," doubtless because there dwelt in their hearts the thought how forms, when divorced from a divine spirit at their root, are bound to change into what we call "fashions"—things, that is to say, certain to become fleeting, ever changeable, because they represent the results of temporary phases of man's beliefs, or moralities, which, when not resting on any fixed revelation of God's will, must needs change from age to age, and even from year to year. ("The last new fashion.")

There is something inherently contemptuous in the phrase. When we say of anything "it has become a fashion," we almost mean it to be inferred that it has become so for no particularly good reason, and will probably some day cease to be so for some reason no better! Ever since the word came to be



applied in our language to men's customs or whims, it has absorbed that other idea of change, and therefore of comparative worthlessness. ~~Now~~ <sup>NP</sup> there is nothing intrinsically worthless, or wrong, in mere change, or in the substitution of one "fashion" for another. In things into which the moral element does not enter, there is no harm in fashion, but obviously much good. Take the most obvious, because vulgarest, use of the term, as applied to dress. ~~Doubtless~~ Into this "fashion," as into every-thing human, the evil will, the low morality of man can intrude. Ostentation, extravagance, self-indulgence, vulgar and reckless competition in all these things, must, and do, intrude. But the love of beauty, of variety, in colour and form, is no base or worldly love. It should not shame us to find pleasure in letting the eye rest upon such things, which like all God's gifts are seen and loved first as we gaze upon the faultless beauties and the ever-changing beauties of His creation. That the eye, given us to perceive and rejoice in these beauties, should long for an ever-changing succession of them; should discern the loveliness of alternation and variety, is no disgrace. Change, transition, contrast, whether in Nature or in Art, how large a part do not these make in the beauty of God's

creation, and of that human art which has grown out of the study of that creation? Should we not be grateful for the "shifting fashions"—for so they are—of God's world: for the shifting fashions of the landscape in winter and in summer, in spring and in autumn? But then in these fashions—these forms and changes—it is the same Nature, the same holy and perfect will of God, "putting forth its power or else withholding it," to accomplish its foreseen ends. So there are human things which must change—"have their day, and cease to be"—because we learn more as time goes on, discover more, penetrate more deeply into the mysteries of the universe, and so array ourselves in ever fresh spoils won from these permitted victories. And so, in a sense, there are "fashions" which are good things; which we need not, and should not, refuse. From time to time, as you know, sects who thought to be truer to the divine will and intention have tried to avoid everything that could be called "fashion"—to adhere to one pattern and hue of clothing; to abstain personally from colour, brightness, and all that makes the charm of God's outer world; and such attempts must fairly be said to have failed; and Nature, driven forcibly away, has yet returned and conquered sooner or later. For among other things, this

attempt to control the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, by a policy of outward uniformity and unchangeableness, has never proved successful. We cannot educate ourselves, so to speak, from the top downwards, morally, any more than we can intellectually. We must be transformed, if at all, "by the renewing of the mind." Do not let us deceive ourselves in this matter, and throw the blame upon the wrong sorts of fashion. There are fashions, alas! in other things far more important than dress and furniture. There are fashions that have not even the excuse of being ultimately traceable to an over-developed love of beautiful things. There are fashions in morals as well as in art; in religion even, as well as in social etiquette; and it is against these that St. Paul warns his Roman Christians. Whenever and wherever the shifting moral sense of Society forms its own rules and standards, without reference to the revelation of God in His Word, and in His Son Jesus Christ, these fashions take their rise—the creations of the world—with no assurance of permanence, because they depend ultimately upon the conscience of the hour, which must needs vary. This must be true of every age—of this age, no less than that of which the Apostle was writing. It is to ~~this~~ <sup>or be fashioned,</sup> that we are not to "conform," if only because

*the conscience of the hour*

*np.*

it has no permanence. There is no security, even if it is decently moral to-day, that it will be the same to-morrow. But the relations of the kingdom of heaven and the world have grown infinitely more complex since St. Paul's day. When he wrote, the boundary line between the Church and the World was tolerably clear and defined. It is no longer so now, and the World presents new fronts to the Church, or rather is so permeated by the ways, if not the spirit, of the Church, that its fashions have become both more complex and more alluring. ~~In~~ <sup>Now</sup> ~~these eighteen centuries,~~ the World has <sup>become</sup> ~~got~~ leavened to a certain extent by the ethics of the Church, and the Church leavened, alas! by the lower morale of the World, so that the boundary lines between the two become fainter and more misleading. And the pressure of the World upon the Church is greater than it was in St. Paul's day, because it touches it at a greater number of points. The fashion of the World seriously threatened the real Christians in Rome; but it now threatens in a thousand fresh ways the nominal Christians of to-day.

“Fashion,” as a term, has degraded since St. Paul's day in yet another, and even sadder, aspect than yet noticed. Fashion, even when a mistake and a corruption, might have at least the merit of

being genuine. It might be, and often is, the product, unseen and unfelt, of anti-Christian forces about us. But how if it has not even this poor excuse, but is a thing deliberately adopted because it is the fashion—in truth, to please other people, whose friendship or countenance we wish to secure. And we always, I think, now recognise this shade of meaning in the word. (Unreality, as well as instability, is inseparable from the name of “fashion.”

“Why does such and such a man or woman do so and so?” “Oh, because it’s the fashion—because it’s the thing to do!” Fashion is the public opinion of the “set,” to which everything else is sacrificed. The tyranny of the “set”—how inflexible its grip! what evils has it not to answer for! The “*vox populi*,” even when it is that of the large, free, public conscience, has no security for being the “*vox Dei*,” but how when it is the voice of a sect or a clique? “~~These are thy gods, O Israel.~~” There is no need to look far below the surface for indications of fashions, real or unreal. They lie all round us, and have a thousand manifestations. To be really cynical is a bad enough thing—an affront to God and an insult to the law of Christian Love; but what shall we say of the cynical fashion, taken up because for the moment, and with certain people we

admire, it is the sign of cleverness and distinction. *here is* The sceptical fashion: to refuse God's revelation, in Nature and in Conscience and in His Word, is sad enough; matter for deep pity as well as reproach; but what shall we say when it too has no root at all, good or evil, but is taken up as a badge of enlightenment, as a mark of separation from the humdrum superstitions of the world, and to win the good opinion of those in whom the same scepticism is perhaps at least genuine? *p* Terrible, again, is the growing defiance of the accepted moralities and decorums—the custom-hallowed decencies and reticences of life—which we see everywhere about us. Everywhere do we see signs of this revolt against old ideas of reverence, of modesty, of charity, and courtesy, under the pretence of protesting against whatever is unreal or hypocritical in the so-called “respectabilities” of life. Where this is a genuine revolt, having a supposed excuse in undoubted conventionalities and hypocrisies to be found among us, it is at least not ignoble; but for one person who is fired by a genuine indignation that over-masters them, how many are there who follow in the same track, only to win credit for the same thing; or even, must we not say, because the laxer morality, the reduced stringency, is easier and pleasanter?

My brethren, these and a thousand other fashions and follies are all around us, and we ourselves, believe it, not uninfluenced by them or free from their danger. The satirists of the day know these things well. The world is keenly alive to its own weak points. But satire has no power to cure them, has no "healing in its wings." Not that satire exercised upon vice, folly, unreality, is a bad thing. Where satire is free from malice and has no private ends to serve, it is a good thing. Vice and folly and pretentiousness should be lashed. We need all reminders of the contemptible side of worldliness and irreverence—I think we may quote some of the holiest of the Jewish prophets as on this side. You remember how Elijah, and after him other great champions of God, turn into bitter scorn the absurdities of idolatry. But they would have been the first to add, that satire never did, and never will, purify the heart of man. For satire only treats symptoms, and no wise physician is content with this. It was one of Pope's half-truths that—

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
That to be hated, needs but to be seen.

But "hated" is just the wrong word here. To see the hatefulness of a thing and to hate it are quite different stages of moral growth. To

hate is the correlative of to love; and when we have once begun to hate the evil that is in the world, we have also begun to hate the evil that is in ourselves, and our deliverance is at hand.]

But no! St. Paul says the last word on this subject. "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove" (discriminate, that is) "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." The "renewing of the mind," the making of the mind within us new! For the mind, not less than the heart, requires illumination from the source of all light and truth and holiness. One fashion cannot be neutralised, or cast out, by another. It might become, for a while, a fashion to be decent; but what guarantee would there be for its lasting? It would straightway wither, because it had not root. The fruit is permanent only when it springs from the root that is permanent.

It is so, and only so, that we can protect ourselves against the slavery of fashion, of unreality, and of perpetual uncertainty. Change, indeed, in another sense, perpetual change, is the very law of our being. We all must needs be changed "by still degrees, all but the basis of the soul." We are not bidden here by St. Paul, or anywhere else by



him, or by his Master, to adopt any mechanical law of uniformity, or of standing still, while others are moving. There is much in the world to which we must conform if we would do our duty to that world, and to the men and women within it. We must accept our share of all fresh knowledge, for all fresh knowledge is fresh power. We cannot refuse the new gifts that God is continually giving us through the brain and labour of men. We may not stagnate, or be left behind, to show how little interested we are in everything not distinctively religious. But there is one uniformity, one standing still and steadfast, that must underlie all these things, in depths unstirred by the waves of other change, the uniform and changeless study of the will of God, and loyalty to it, the constant exercise of discrimination between that will, so good, perfect, and acceptable to Him, and the fluctuating will of a public opinion not thus guided. To keep mind and intelligence in constant touch with that which never changes—the nature and the will, the character and the purposes of Jesus Christ—this is the service in the dedication of ourselves to which we break the bonds of all other fashions, and so alone *live*, amid the phantasmagorias of the world, the shifting opinions and standards, which make up so much

that is called "life." You remember the story told by Wilkie the painter, of the Spanish monk showing him the painting of the "Last Supper," upon the refectory wall, upon which he had gazed so long. He had said how dear through old association became those "lifeless images," and then corrected himself:—

Lifeless—ah ! no ; while in my heart are stored  
 Sad memories of my brethren dead and gone,  
 Familiar places vacant round our board,  
 And still that silent Supper lasting on ;  
 While I review my youth—what I was then,  
 What I am now, and ye, beloved ones all !  
 It seems as if these were the living men,  
 And we the coloured shadows on the wall.

Surely this familiar story is an allegory illustrating St. Paul's teaching. The Last Supper, the prelude to the great Sacrifice ; the final test of the perfect manhood ; the eternal model for all times and all lands—these are things that live indeed ; and the fashions, the moods, the fancies, the paltry ambitions, and the unreal pretences of men, these are the things that pass away : these the coloured and the shifting shadows on the wall !

## XII

### THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—2 COR. iv. 18.

IT has been truly said that “every man has two birthdays” : his own individual, personal birthday, that anniversary of the day on which he became a “living soul,” and that other anniversary which reminds him as poignantly of the flight of time, and the passing of another milestone on the road of life, the first day of a new year. And the tender and pathetic essayist who made the remark just quoted, goes on to say, that contrary to what might have been expected, the second of these birthdays affects us in general more than the first, or at least more forcibly touches the imagination. And I think this is so, though for other and deeper reasons than the essayist would hint at. The lessons suggested by entering

on new stages of a life and a year are perhaps different. A new stage in one's own existence here on earth reminds us, or should do so, of lost opportunities and fruitless resolves, or of a period beyond all question shortened, in which to make good these losses and deficiencies. It is strictly a personal question and a personal crisis. But the flight of another year brings in larger, deeper thoughts, and these not less important personally, because it is not with ourselves first that the broodings and reflections are concerned. The flight of another year does not so much awaken thought of a period coming nearer to its end. We cannot realise a termination to time in general, as we can a nearer approximation to the end of our own individual lives. In a sense, the antithesis to a life-time is the death which will one day, and that ever drawing nearer, bring it to a close. But the antithesis to time, regarded as a sequence of years, doubtless limited in the knowledge of God, but to our eyes and our foresight unlimited, is not death, or time's collapse, but something which is at once time and no time,—not merely time everlasting, as opposed to time having bound and end,—and that something, however we may misuse or misunderstand the name, is what the Bible has taught

us to call Eternity. As in the words of St. Paul before us, the antithesis would seem to be not one of duration, but of essence. "The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal." If we try the experiment of substituting our own vulgar equivalent for these words in the passage, we shall see at once how unspiritual, how unenlightening they become. "The things we see, last only for a short time; the things we do not see, will endure in perpetuity." As soon as ever we reduce St. Paul's antithesis to this shape we see at once that all light and life have passed out of it. There is nothing, there can be nothing, ennobling and inspiring in one thing lasting longer than another. There can be nothing to teach and help us in such a revelation of what God has prepared for them that love Him. | What we long for, if we have learned the nature of God aright, is not a pledge of perpetuity hereafter for the things we enjoy here, but which otherwise death must one day deprive us of. It is a change in the things themselves, not in their duration, that we crave and yearn for. One hour of God outweighs an eternity of earth! The Christian would choose the first without hesitation if the alternative lay between them. It is the "things unseen," the revelation of God's goodness, the

triumphs of His will, our reconciliation, our restoration, the peace that passeth understanding,—these are the things that are eternal ; that have no part or lot in time ; that exist before time and after time. And it is the suggested contrast of these things with those which have their birth in time, and are therefore the creatures and the dependents of time, that St. Paul here points out as the strength and comfort of himself and his Corinthian fellow-sufferers when their need was sorest, and when the earthly outlook seemed most dark and hopeless.

And, my brethren, I think that this is at least one of the chief thoughts that make themselves felt in the opening days of another year. It is true that we have another of these years the fewer to spend ; that we, and those round us, may no longer be here to witness such another anniversary. But there must come to many of us, as I have already suggested, doubts and misgivings, not of the quantity of this thing called time, but of its quality. Whether we are destined to experience and enjoy much more of it, or not, is not our deepest and dearest interest. As long as we live we must be in it. We cannot abstract ourselves from time any more than we can from the world. Time has its duties and claims, even as the world has, and we must not reckon on

being too bright and good "for human nature's daily food," in these regards also. But St. Paul's words remind us of something which we might at once dismiss as the dream of an exceptional poet and mystic, if it did not somehow find an echo in our own dreams also—dreams connected somehow with a faculty within us, restless and continuous in its suggestiveness. Language, said the philosophic cynic, was given us to conceal our thoughts. Time, must we not say, is ours (though assuredly not given us for that purpose) to "conceal from us Eternity"? How many of us, at least, use it for that purpose, and with what fatal result! How many of us so arrange our time, which means also arrange our lives, as to bar out the thought of eternity, and keep it from intruding, and spoiling and mixing bitter elements with the enjoyments that belong to time! For it is eternity that we are trying to get rid of when we invent new occupations and distractions that may spread over the whole day. We talk of killing Time, but the phrase is a misnomer. It is Eternity that men are trying to kill when they act in that fashion. Time is the friend of the worldly and the godless. It is their one bulwark against the intrusion of an enemy who seems to have come to "torment them" prematurely. If they lost

the help and resource of time, they would be left alone with the infinite and the eternal ; and “ that way,” to the man or woman of unsanctified heart— “ that way madness lies ! ”

You see that I am speaking of Eternity as if it had always a definite and religious signification, not connected with future judgment and punishment. Many people, no doubt, have no other idea connected with Eternity than that of a future, unending, condition of indescribable punishment. “ Has Eternity no terrors for you ? ” would be a natural and common mode of addressing a hardened and obstinate sinner ; but the inquirer would certainly mean, “ Has not the thought of a future day of retribution, to take effect after your death, any terrors for you ? ” I do not say that this is not a legitimate and a most awful question. But there are hundreds and thousands of persons who imagine themselves to have out-grown all such superstitions as this, and yet are living in fear and hatred, quite as deep-seated, of an Eternity that lies ever near them, but which their whole lives are arranged so as to keep out of sight and out of mind ! My brethren, we may kill Time ; but we cannot, by any amount of denial and protest, kill Eternity. Get rid of the enemy which theologians so persistently threaten you with, but you are no nearer to having



got rid of the thing itself. Change its name, if you will, so as to rob it of all theological associations and significance, but you cannot change its nature. It is about us and around us, about our path and about our bed, and if it is not our friend, it is our enemy. There is—whether we choose to accept St. Paul's words or reject them—there is before "the earthly house of this tabernacle" came into existence, there will be after it is dissolved, a "building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Mankind did not create this belief, to which St. Paul gives expression. St. Paul did not invent it, Jesus Christ did not invent it, the mystical dreams and prophetic musings on things to come, under the older Dispensation,—it is not to these singly or collectively that we owe this development of doctrine. The "house not made with hands" has encircled every man, since the first man was created in the image of God. Eternity is the essence and the spirit of God; and man made in God's image—however that image be defaced, overlaid, hidden—must needs walk in closest neighbourhood with it, and must needs either hate it or love it, must either cherish it as his dearest, his only permanent possession, or else must seek to get rid of it, as an inconvenient and intrusive critic and judge of his every thought and deed.

And thus, on the opening Sunday of a new year, this seems a fitting theme for our consideration. The mere shortness of time may be a trite and unfruitful homily; but the inadequacy of time, whether long or short, to nourish and sustain the nature of an immortal being, this is the only fruitful topic. The things that are eternal—to keep our eye fixed upon these, says St. Paul, is the true refuge from time and the world. To keep our eye fixed upon definite religious doctrines and our own salvation; such is the religious man's common explanation of the words, but it is not a complete substitute for them. We are often confronted, painfully and sadly, by the phenomenon of persons to whom such religious teaching and consolation conveys no meaning, and in whom it awakens no sympathy. There is no sadder, more perplexing experience than this. The message of Christ, which to one person has proved the one key unlocking the mysteries of life and death and sin, and solving riddles otherwise unsolvable, to another person is like a foreign tongue, or a tale told by an idiot. Why is this, we ask? Why is that which to one man is a perfect music, the resolution of all discords, the answer to all vague longings and aspirations—why is it meaningless to another? In one family,

where the influences of home have been the same for all, one child welcomes the message, grows in all moral loveliness by its grace and power; and another hears it and goes his way unmoved, unwarned, unenlightened. We have all known such instances; something of the kind fills us with uneasy wonder every day of our lives, if, that is to say, we are watching anxiously the prospects and the fluctuations of Christian teaching in the world. Why is this one taken, and that one left? Why does Christianity pass through a house, and yet bless only one here and there? Vain questioning; for who can look into the workings of another soul, and note when and how the first germs of eternal life approached that soul, and how they were either welcomed or resisted? We cannot solve such questions, for we cannot know the facts. But we can note to some extent whether the avenues, by which Christ's truth can alone approach the soul, are kept closed or open. We can note to some extent whether a life in any way keeps in touch with the eternal, or whether it busies itself exclusively with the temporal. For there are two organs necessary for the soul that would communicate with its Maker,—the voice that speaks, but also the ear that hears.

Do we provide the ear that hears? That is the

question that concerns us. Or, if we would keep closer to the metaphor that St. Paul uses, do we provide the seeing eye? He declares that the eternal things are not seen. But he, Paul, saw them with that inward eye, which is the "bliss of solitude," but the bliss of solitude spent in lonely communion with the Most High. He was environed by eternity, like all other men, but he and his fellow-Christians felt, and were in touch with, eternity; and others were not. The ear and the eye, that heard and saw what others could not or would not hear and see, were quick and powerful in these Christians at Corinth. My brethren, why are so many of us not in touch with the things that are eternal? Forget for the moment the specific doctrines that are taught in church. If these doctrines were not taught here, or if you never heard them, there would still be an atmosphere of eternity about you, as well as the grosser atmosphere of time. Why are some of us fully aware of the one, but not of the other? Because we never close the ear that listens to the world, so that we can listen to that deeper harmony, that sweeter strain. We have the power to do this if we will. We are not bound to listen only to one note among the many that are for ever dinning in our ears. It is just the same with physical sounds -

—with the sounds heard with bodily ears. | It is a marvellous but familiar fact, that when an orchestra is playing, the ear of the listener can so concentrate itself upon one particular class of sounds in the united harmony,—the note of the clarionet, the note of the violoncello,—as to hear that alone; the rest subordinate if not all but extinguished. Mysterious truth, showing that even in the realm of physical nature we do not see with the eye only, or hear with the ear only, but with the brain, or something more spiritual still, that lies behind eye and ear. And so it is, not less but more so, with the visions and melodies addressed to man's eternal part. We see what we wish to see among all the sights that tempt our souls; and we hear what we wish and set ourselves to hear. We can see only the temporal, if all we wish is to see the temporal; and we can see the eternal, if our desire is to see the eternal.

But it is not only the wish, it is the will—a very different thing. The fruit of idle wishing may be nought, or even blank despair. Will implies something like effort, or perseverance; it implies that we will arrange our own environments in such a way as that God's enviring eternity shall have its chance of touching us, and wakening us, and leading us along the way it would ordain for us. My brethren,

we cannot live wholly among the things of time and yet retain a surface which can vibrate to the touch of the things that are eternal. It is not merely wicked and noxious things, or things on the borderland between what is lawful and unlawful, that harden in us the sensitive membrane that feels the gentle breath of the Spirit of God. It is not the touch of worldly things that is the enemy of spiritual. It is that we give ourselves up to these things, and listen to their voices, and never put them by to listen to those other voices which are audible, though so many of us declare that they are not. And it is not only being *willing* to hear ; we do not give ourselves a chance of hearing, if we live only with the things of time. Look at the books or other printed matter that people read. How many are there not who read constantly and assiduously, but always of things that are part and parcel of the temporal? I do not speak now of the Bible ; but even if the Bible had nothing of the miraculous in it, or of the supernatural, yet the simple fact that it records growth, and human struggle and defeat, and the efforts of man after a knowledge of something beyond this earth, makes it a book calculated to purge our vision, by the very contagion of sympathy and the instinct of self-examination that it must

awaken in us. But look how many people read day and night only the latest and passing events or incidents of the outward existence of their fellows. Look at the time given to the newspaper—that very incarnation of what is temporary—that craving after news, which becomes by degrees a kind of mental dram-drinking, exciting for the moment, but leaving only depression behind. The craving after hearing or telling “some new thing,” as with the Athenians of old, really kills that true knowledge of which it supposes itself to be a worthy companion. No one would be so fanatical as to proscribe the reading of our daily paper, but what can be the intellectual or moral state of a mind that reads nothing else?

But this is but a single symptom of the nature which thinks it can develop a wholesome relation to truth and goodness by touching only the fleeting events of our transitory existence. The moral of the whole matter is, that those of us who are only in touch with such things cannot expect to have a relish, or even an intelligence, for the things that are eternal. There is but one organ to which Christ’s revelation of God can appeal, and that organ is an ear, or a heart, in the habitual practice of listening for the voice of the Eternal. St. John’s “Love not the world” is perhaps only another way

of saying, "Love not the things of time." Just as the *world* in St. John's sense is not a place, so *time* in St. Paul's sense is not a matter of length or shortness. Either is a "spirit," the spirit which is opposed to Christ, because it ignores the whole range of consciousness on which Christ came to practice, and which He aimed at eliciting and explaining.

My brethren, let us, at the opening of another year, resolve that we will give ourselves at least a chance of hearing the voices that tell us of eternal things. It rests with the ear quite as much as with the speaking voice, whether a message shall reach its mark. Give some opportunity to the things of eternity, give some time to thought and to reading about things that do not perish. The mere things of to-day,—daily gossip, daily facts, the last new sensation,—do not leave us better prepared for the facts of God's nature and our own destiny. Help us, your teachers, by bringing something with you that is likely to be in harmony at least with the world to which we witness. For only to the heart that "watches and receives" has the message of Christ any intelligible meaning.



### XIII

#### “HE KNEW WHAT WAS IN MAN”

“Now, when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast-day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man : for He knew what was in man.”—JOHN ii. 23-25.

THERE is an obscurity here which is only partially cleared up in our Revised Version, which reads—instead of “did not commit Himself unto them”—did not “trust Himself unto them.”

The Greek word for “*believe*”—“many believed in His name”—is the same word as is in the same sentence translated “commit” or “trust”; and if we had only followed the natural course, we should have seen that what St. John meant to emphasise was this: that though certain of the Jews had begun to believe in Jesus—to trust Him—because of certain miracles they had witnessed, He was not able to trust them in return. (They were inclined to

become His followers because these *signs* (as St. John always calls them) were so marvellous. But this was not the kind of allegiance that Jesus valued or wished for. Wonder, and the fear that wonder creates, was not the quality He cared to see; for He knew that it leads to nothing of greater worth, that it is not the parent of love and obedience. He would not accept them as followers upon those terms. He could not trust a loyalty built upon the recognition of Him as a supernatural worker of magic. Therefore, says St. John, Jesus did not trust Himself to them, "because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man." That is to say, Jesus had discovered this fact. No disciple had come to Him and said, "Master, I have reason to know that these new adherents are only following you because of the miracles." Jesus had read the secrets of their hearts for Himself. He did not need any private information from those who had talked with the would-be followers, and so learned their worthlessness. "He did not need that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man."

"He knew all men." "He knew what was in man." This power in Jesus to read the thoughts of all persons who came in contact with Him, whether

friends or enemies—whether as suppliants for His help, or as critics and scorers of His pretensions—was beyond all question one of the first things that struck and impressed the world, and gradually brought men to His feet as ardent believers and disciples. And if, when I use the expression, “read the thoughts,” our own thoughts turn for a moment to a so-called “thought-reading” that has been made a miracle of by the foolish in our own day, let us call to mind that a very human sort of sagacity and cunning is needed to work these popular modern miracles, and that it is quite other thoughts—what Scripture calls the “thoughts of the heart”—that Jesus showed from the first He could read. For it was not the thoughts that were travelling rapidly through the subject’s mind, quickening his pulse and even dominating the action of the muscles—not these that Jesus divined with the practised observation of a clever mind; but those innermost depths of personality, those real motives and springs of action which the possessor himself was not aware of, those glimpses, visions, intimations, waiting for the birth, in the hearts and consciences of the men and women about Him. He told men and women “what was in them” before they even knew it themselves. And when afterwards they found that He

had spoken true, who can wonder that they suspected Him to be more than human? For He not only spake as man never before spake, but looked into the heart of things as man never before looked.

And as we trace the history of these three years of public life, we see how from the first this faculty in Him impressed men. For it is not the mystical St. John alone who records the fact. It is quite as often in the first three Gospels that we find such words as these: "Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts," or, "When Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned." But even such express declarations as these do not so clearly show us how this knowledge of His affected those who watched Him, as do the everyday acts of mercy, or words of counsel, to those who came to Him in their trouble. We watch Him, in every recorded instance, sounding the very depths of the suppliant's nature; laying His hand on the precise seat of their unhappiness or disobedience; telling them of their real trouble before they had discovered it for themselves; putting into words the stumbling guesses or vague reproaches of their perplexed consciences. In the beautiful words of our familiar collect, He "knew their necessities before they asked, and their ignorance in asking." The

woman who was a sinner ; the young man who had great possessions ; Nicodemus the ruler of the Jews ; Zacchaeus the publican ; the father of the possessed son ; the disciple summoned from the receipt of custom ; the disciples called from their nets on the sea of Galilee ;—He knew them and their inmost natures : their doubts and fears, their capacities and their temptations, and above all their hidden consciousness of sin. He showed that He knew them, but also that He knew man. Not merely was He a judge, distinguishing between this man and that, but He knew all which belonged to each and all of them alike, and it was this, as it appears to me, that at once attracted human beings to Him, and in the process revealed to them who He was. By showing that He knew them, they came to know Him, and to know Him to be divine. And this was clearly the one kind of evidence for Himself that He wished to see convince men, because that alone was of any real value to the person who discovered it. The incident in the text, like many other similar incidents in His life, proves this. The men who found evidence for His being the true deliverer of mankind only in His miracles He had no trust in. The men who hailed Him as the great champion revolutionist, who was to restore to the

Jews their old supremacy, He trusted as little. He worked miracles, but it was as *signs—witnesses*—of the nature of His Father in heaven. He claimed to be a king, but His throne was to be in the souls of men. But when He drew to Him the sinning and the sorrowful, the weary and the heavy-laden, by the attractive force of knowing them as they were, and showing that He knew them, revealing each man to himself; explaining all their hidden fears, and hopes, and aspirations; then His real sovereignty over them was begun. As each man came to see himself as Jesus saw him, he came to perceive that Jesus was and could be no other than his Lord and Saviour. This is one explanation of that wonderful saying repeated in so many forms, "I am the Light of the World." "That was the true Light which lighteth every man born into the world." The Light, which really lights us, is the light which shows to us our real selves, which penetrates into the darkest, obscurest recesses of our moral nature, and makes us see ourselves as we are. Christ is the Light of the World because "He knows what is in man."

And so it came to pass that the "Light of the World" identified Himself in the acceptance of men with their Father in heaven. For He who knows

perfectly “what is in man,” can be no other than the Creator of man. Rationalists and philosophers have wondered how men’s belief in Christ, at first loved and followed because He healed their sicknesses and taught them how to avoid sin and live better for the future, led them to exalt Him in the end to the pinnacle of Deity—how the name “Son of man” merged into that of “Son of God”; and how the Son of God received a meaning more stupendous still from the declarations of Jesus Himself—“I and my Father are one.” And indeed it is wonderful and inconceivable, unless we realise that Jesus could only have thus identified Himself with the Father by showing that He knew men, even as the Father knew them. “Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts.” This is the human confession which makes the revelation of God in the Old and New Testaments one and the same. You will find that the omniscience of God, that in which He shows His essential superiority over His creatures, would have kept those creatures alienated from Him in sheer terror and the abject sense of insignificance, but that His omniscience as regards themselves—knowing man, and what is in man—brought them together. “Lord *thou* knowest” is the justification and the encouragement of each one

of His saints in turn. Each one who is struggling, dimly and darkly, and through many falls and hesitations, after God, is saved from despair by this knowledge that God knows him—the good and the evil alike that are fighting for the mastery. "O God *thou* knowest" is the key-note of all the confessions of the Psalmist. Now it is a confession of weakness that is thus introduced, now of strength. "I delight to do thy will, O God : yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation : I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, *thou knowest.*" Or again, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising : thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compasses my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. . . . Such knowledge is too wonderful for me ; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit ? or whither shall I flee from thy presence ? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there : if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand



shall hold me.” And yet, though the thought of the Lord’s omniscience is “too wonderful” for the Psalmist, it is the ground of his confidence and love, not of despair. He would not wish that God should know him less well. His one hope lies in this marvellous fact, that God knows him ; because He who knew the evil that was in him, knew also, and made the justest allowance for, the good that was struggling upwards against that evil. Therefore it is that he cries, “Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

I may leave you to verify for yourselves, what there is no time to pursue farther, how this knowledge of God in the Old Testament is acquired. No man, there or elsewhere, “by searching” finds out God. It is God who finds them and shows them to themselves. That which preserves a Job from despair and a scepticism that might have driven him mad, is the appeal from men who do not know him to God who does. The strength of the prophets, persecuted and maligned, consists in the consciousness that in the same appeal is their refuge and strength. And as we pass from the utterances of the prophets—each in turn declaring

to the apostate Jews that God sees them as they are, that their real self is dark and rotten—to the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, we find no break, no suspension of the same divine method. Jesus, the last and greatest of the prophets, came to show that He "knew what was in man." And as the conviction of this omniscience dawned upon the sinful and weary, and gradually broadened into boundless day, can we wonder that the reverence and fear, the confidence and love, due to the Lord of men's spirits came to be lavished upon Him? There were those who marvelled at His mighty works, perhaps also at His loving-kindness, and that moral sublimity in Him that differenced Him from all other teachers, past and then living; and yet who resisted the message He brought to their own souls. He showed them Himself, but they resisted the Light that should have lighted them and showed them their own selves. Ever since, there has been this difference between those who acknowledge the greatness and beauty of the teacher, and go no further, and those who, allowing that greatness and beauty to illuminate the dark places of their own being—their weakness and their baseness—surrender themselves to the new Light, and so become new creatures. When once they become

aware that Christ has found them, they have also found themselves. And they know that He who has thus found them is, and must be, divine. As on another occasion recorded by St. John, they find in Christ's knowledge of their hearts “the assurance of His divine mission.”<sup>1</sup> “Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.”

“He knew all men. He knew what was in man.” In these words St. John confesses the Deity of Jesus. He is declaring that which could not have been declared of any, the greatest, prophet or moralist that had ever trod this earth. The difference is one not of degree but of kind. Among ourselves we doubtless admire and are fascinated by that quality which we call a marvellous knowledge of men, or insight into human nature. We are all the gainers by the great thinkers who have displayed this insight—a Plato, a Bacon, a Pascal, a Goethe—those who

took the suffering human race  
And read each wound, each weakness clear.

But this insight of others makes us wiser rather than better. They teach us also to judge other

<sup>1</sup> See Westcott on St. John xvi. 30.

men, and even ourselves, better than before; but if they open the moral, or even the spiritual eye, they do not of necessity strengthen for us the moral will. We admire the fresh views they open to us of human nature, its strength and its weakness, but they do not go far towards delivering us from the real bondage—the worst bondage—a bondage worse than ignorance, from which we suffer. The thinker who sees farther than we into the dark places of the human heart as often repels as attracts. He is often a satirist; if there is nothing winning about the satirist, there is almost as little about the mere moral critic. The human critic of our common nature is not brought nearer to us by seeing us clearer than we see ourselves. But it was not so with Jesus Christ. On the rare occasions when it was mainly His supernatural knowledge that was exhibited to His hearers, they were awe-struck indeed, and disposed the more readily to accept His claim to be one greater than human, but they were not therefore the spiritually wiser and better. When Jesus met the woman of Samaria at the well and showed her that He knew all her past history, she went her way impressed indeed with the conviction that she had held converse with some one greater than human: "Come, see a man which told me all

things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?” But we do not gather that she was drawn to Him in any deeper way. If she had come to Him, or if He had found her in her sin and sorrow, and He had sounded for her the depths of her evil conscience, explaining to her her yearnings and her regrets, her glimpses of a Love that had ever been wrestling with her for the victory; if she could have called to those around her, “Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I *was*,” then the words of her surrender would have been far different. Then she would have gone forth, not wondering only, but sorrowing and yet rejoicing, declaring not alone, “Surely this is Messiah,” but crying to Him, with the once sceptical apostle, “*My* Lord and *my* God!”

Not knowledge only, but knowledge coupled with perfect sympathy and divinest pity, makes the one only sure refuge, the one only satisfaction for the heart of man. Perfect knowledge and perfect love, each, without the other, would fail to “draw all men unto it.” To be really understood as well as really loved is what the soul craves for.

It is the lack of this double gift, of insight and charity, that makes the closest bonds of merely human sympathy incomplete. In the differences that must needs come between one and another

member of a family, between one and another friend, how often has one who tried to justify himself to another, craved at one moment to be loved as well as understood; at another to be understood as well as loved. There are occasions when we do not doubt the affection, but feel that we could do without that, if only we were rightly judged. Or at another time, when scrutinised with the cold, clear eye of some reader of motives, we are inclined to cry in anguish, "Yes, it may be all you say: self clings to me, and motives more or less unworthy or at least mixed—pride, vanity, temper, no doubt, are present; but oh! for the charity which would look deeper than these things, and recognise the best in me, and help it to prevail." For in this last case, it is not the completeness of the insight which wrongs us, but the incompleteness. How often the little knowledge makes us scorn and dislike our neighbour, when the deeper knowledge would make us pity and love. How often would the deeper affection purify the critical insight, and how often again the truer reading of hearts quicken the affection. It was the union of these two divine gifts, the perfect love, the perfect insight, that constituted the charm and the power of Jesus of Nazareth. It was this that drew to Him the

publican and the sinner, that repelled from Him the formalist and the truster in his own righteousness. Those who, under whatever crusts of sin and worldliness, were feeling after something better, hating themselves, and groping blindly after some better self, long outraged or long forgotten,—these were drawn towards the pure and perfect figure who paused to look upon them in His daily walk. Sin-stained and scarred as they were, outcasts from the seemly and the respectable societies of men, they knew that Jesus knew all the worst that was in them, but they knew also that He also knew the best. It was in His perfect knowledge that their comfort lay. For He knew their sin and their evil ways, but He also knew, what no one else knew—what they themselves hardly knew—that there was in them a something, struggling after the good, which was their real self, whereas the other was their spurious self. It was not alone the perfect love of Jesus on which they threw themselves with such confidence and joy; it was the perfect knowledge also. The one without the other would have failed to bring them to His feet. Consider, for instance, what followed upon Peter's denial of his Master—that fall from so great a height. Surely there is nothing in the annals of human nature more

touching, more instructive, than the later incident in that career, when a few days after the Lord's resurrection He addressed Himself to this same apostle with the memorable question, "Simon Peter, lovest thou me?" You remember the reiterated question, and the reiterated answer, ending with, "*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.*" Wonderful, and most instructive! After all that had gone before: after Peter's repeated faithlessness and cowardice; sudden self-confidence, and collapse of it as sudden; he could still cry to Him, against whom he had thus sinned, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." To no one else in that band of perplexed followers would Peter have dared to make this memorable declaration. He would not have dared, at that moment, to call his brethren to witness to his love for his Master. For they had been witnesses of his defection, and they *did not* know all things. Only to One who knows all things and all men, dare we appeal from the half-knowledge and partial judgments of our fellows. This, my brethren, is our happiness, and should be our greatest encouragement. As long as we are doubtful which way our hearts and steps are bent, the thought of the omniscience of Christ is our



torment ; we try to escape from it or forget it. Once accept Him as Friend and Saviour, and then, through falls and weaknesses, failures and inconsistencies, we can trust His love, because He knows us. “If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things ; if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”

## XIV

### THE TRUE AND THE SPURIOUS PROPHETIC SPIRIT

“For, behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings.”—MALACHI iv. 1-2.

WHAT is a Prophet? We all think we know, or have a tolerably correct idea. Perhaps we have at last nearly got rid of the old inveterate error of identifying prophecy with prediction, and thinking of the prophet as having for chief function the power to foresee, by divine inspiration, things that are going to happen in the future; but even when we have cleared our minds of this delusion, and have recognised that the prophet is, in truth as in etymology, the “preacher,” the man who speaks *for* and *in the name of* God—the declarer of His truth and His righteousness, and of men’s responsibilities

—even here there may enter in various conventional notions, reflections of our own biassed judgments, that considerably hinder us in knowing the true prophet when he appears. Let us assume then that we have got rid of the more obvious misconceptions that attach to the name. Let us assume that we are all agreed in thinking of the prophet as having pre-eminently to do with the existence of good and evil in the world, and that we no longer think of the foresight of far-off events as his chief note. I think that the next dominant idea that holds our minds on the subject is the idea of the prophet as a declarer of God's judgments. A single illustration may show this. We are all familiar with the phrase "a prophet of evil." And by this we do not mean a predictor of evil in the sense of one who is privileged to see far into the future, but strictly and properly one who declares that evil is and must be the end and result of man's disobedience. When we hear of a man speaking like a prophet, or like one of the prophets of old, we think almost instinctively of one whose staple language is that of denunciation. "Woe unto you" seems to us the most characteristic cry of the prophet. "Woe unto you, sinners, hypocrites, men of pleasure, hard hearts and dark consciences,"—this is the message that we should first think of if we

were told that a new prophet had arisen among us. "A prophet of evil." We have come to couple the two things together. If some one utters a timely warning, which we perhaps think untimely, it is quite a natural retort to say, "Oh, don't be a prophet of evil!" But how seldom do we ever hear or utter the phrase, "a prophet of good." There is <sup>\*</sup>no reason why we should not. If God has promised throughout the length and breadth of His Word that misery and disaster must be the end of sin, He has also promised, as constantly and as emphatically, that happiness and good must be the end and reward of righteousness. Therefore it is certain that "a prophet of good" is not only allowable, but is the necessary companion and complement of the other more familiar phrase. But we do not find ourselves using it, or hearing it; and the reason must be that we are more impressed by the one function of the prophet than by the other. We associate him more with denunciation than with the offer and promise of reward. We associate him with discouragement rather than with encouragement. Yet we have heard the prophetic voice, on this the last day of the Church's year, exercising both these functions with no uncertain voice. If the words, "Behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the

proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble : and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch,"—if these words represent the more popular view of the prophetic message, they are followed immediately by others which supply that other view of it, as the offerer of hope and comfort : " But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings."

It would take a long time to review the course of Hebrew prophecy, and to set side by side the leading utterances in both these kinds to show that the primary type of prophet from which the nations of Christendom draw their idea of the office is certainly not of the kind which has most impressed the popular imagination. The prophets of Israel and Judah present marked differences from each other, differences of individual temperament, which it is easy to detect ; but the " Thus saith the Lord," which is the keyword of the message entrusted to them, knows no difference of import. The burden of all prophecy is the same : despair for the wilful continuer in wrong-doing ; but also hope for the faithful abider by the law of righteousness. We need not to-day go beyond those chapters of Malachi which happen to form the appointed lesson.

It is a fair and by no means exceptional instance of the presence of the offered "despair" and the offered "hope" side by side. At one moment we hear the awful words, "I will come near you to judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts"; but in the same breath we have the tender and pleading message of comfort, "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts." "I will open unto you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it"; and, as in the words of our text, "Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings." We must content ourselves to-day with the single prophetic utterance before us, as the type and model of all the rest, as the representative of the true prophetic message, and the true and effective prophetic temper. The message and the temper are one, from the first chapter of Isaiah to the last of Malachi; and it is on this point that I am urging your attention to-day.

For, as I have said, we are apt to form our ideas

of the prophetic method upon somewhat different models. The prophet, like other moral and spiritual teachers, has two functions to perform, a destructive and a constructive function. Christ shattered to atoms the Pharisaic theory of the Sabbath, but He gave in exchange the eternal principle of the true Sabbath as man's helper and guide. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." St. Paul shattered the then dominant beliefs as to the restrictions upon religious liberty, but he built up in return the true law and spirit of Christian freedom. So the prophet is, in an eminent degree, both a destroyer and a denouncer. He has to denounce evil, and to refute unworthy views of God at every turn; he is always exposing sophistries and fallacies, but his message does not end there. If his message had ended there, the value of the prophetic method would have vanished. For to denounce, and never to recognise anything as worthy of praise, to threaten without promising, to discourage and never to encourage, to predict evil and disaster and never to let it appear that there is triumph and blessedness in store for those who remain loyal to the kingdom of God—this may impress men, nay, even has great fascination for them, but it does not convert them, it does not inspire them. I repeat, that one-half of the prophetic

message, the half that denounces and threatens and shows the hopelessness of the present state of things, is the more impressive and fascinating for the majority of men, and that being the case, the man who professes to speak in the name of truth and right will always attract most, and will most surely be accounted a prophet, whose dominant note is to this effect. In the minds of most of us the prophet is one who finds all things bad and unsatisfactory, and has boundless scorn, indignation, and promise of disaster at his command to pour around it. But he who denounces evil and threatens punishment, and leaves mainly dissatisfaction, discouragement, and despair as his legacy to the world; who destroys without building up; or who is content with vague praise of the Good and the True without pointing to any divine help from without, or any methods of discipline by which we may know what is good and true, and may be trained in the knowledge and practice of it, such an one is but a maimed and incomplete prophet, and if we trust only to the denouncer, the destroyer, the discourager, we shall not make way in the steep and difficult path of righteousness, or receive the hope and enthusiasm even to attempt it.

It is by hope that we are saved, said St. Paul to



the Romans, and the saying is the key-note of all his teaching, as, I need not say, of the whole teaching of the Gospel. It is just as markedly the key-note of all the Old Testament prophecy. By hope, not by despair; and therefore the prophet who makes despair the dominant voice of his utterances is an incomplete and therefore a dangerous prophet. The prophet of despair will always be popular, for it is, in the first place, easier to despair than to hope. The fascination of believing that everything is going to the bad may be enjoyed by us with our arms folded, and the sense of idle resignation to the inevitable, but hope means the girding of the loins and the trimming of the lamps and the resolute attitude of strife. That is, no doubt, the first and principal reason why the prophet of evil is always more popular than the prophet of good. But if it be true that by hope we are saved, if this is not a doctrinal maxim, belonging to one particular religion (the Christian), but is a principle of eternal and universal application, then the true prophet must be the man who has the gift of instilling and fostering hope. And this brings us to recognise that there is something else besides the message he bears that determines the credentials of the true prophet. There is a prophetic *message*; but there

is also, not less important, a prophetic *temper*, and a prophetic *tone*, and a prophetic *method*. I am not speaking, of course, of the prophet's own life, as forming a commentary or illustration of the truths he proclaims. We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the private lives of the Hebrew prophets. We may be sure that it is well for us that we do not. We may be sure that (being men like ourselves) they had their full share of the frailties and inconsistencies of their kind. We may be still more sure that these inconsistencies pained and weighed heavily on themselves, and that the burden of them was often intolerable. We know that Isaiah's call to the prophetic office found him full of such convictions of personal unfitness, and that he saw himself a man "of unclean lips," dwelling among a people of unclean lips. And we see clearly in all his utterances, and in all of his great companions' utterances, that the consciousness of evil in themselves and the struggle against it is always present, showing itself unmistakably in the tremulous emotion and the passionate yearnings of their speech. We are, to this extent, interested in the prophet's own life. If it were not for the struggle going on within himself we are certain that he could not understand that struggle (though himself an

inspired man) as it went on in other people. But we may be thankful that we are not admitted to watch the inconsistencies or lapses that must have been his in his own private or domestic life. Our interest is in what he yearned and struggled for, rather than in his actual measure of achievement; seeing that

'Tis not what man does that exalts him, but what man would do.

But putting this aside, we are directly concerned (because the prophet's own power to help us depends on it) with his temper, tone, and mood. And beneath, or above, all differences of individual temperament in the Hebrew prophets we find perfect unity in these respects. There is, of course, a common hatred of evil and passion for good. That is obvious. But hatred of evil may show itself in different ways. For there is the hatred of evil with which God hates it, and there is a hatred of it which is so blended with scorn and contempt and intolerance in the person feeling that hatred, that the God-like quality of love and pity which should inspire it seems almost wanting. In these respects the true prophetic mind about sin and towards the sinner is the mind of God. We mark the Hebrew prophets' indignation with the peoples

or the individuals who have forgotten God. That indignation shows itself in fierce language of reprobation, sometimes indeed in branding sarcasm and irony, but these accents of anger never drown in them the deeper accent of sorrow. "*The pity of it! The pity of it!*" The wonderful cry that our great dramatist puts into the mouth of Othello, this is audible through all the prophetic outpourings. And this because they are so interpenetrated with the divine love for sinning men. The true prophet, in looking on the evil in the world and loathing it, has emptied himself of any personal feeling. It is not that the sin he looks upon offends *his* better sense; it is not his own superiority to the hypocrites and formalists around him that lashes him into scorn, and makes him tear down and trample under foot the worn-out superstitions and fallacies that he finds still reigning in the world. It is not that the people of Israel are mostly fools that stirs the prophet's own personal bile. The love and pity with which God has inspired him prevent the possibility of this. And therefore the prophetic tone, while always one of indignation, is one of indignation *in the name of God*, and not in that of the prophet's own personal superiority; and it is grounded upon the divine pity for the sinner and yearning for him. I know

that in the prophetic writings the language of indignation, the *woe! woe!* may exceed in actual amount the passages of sweet and tender consolation with which they are interspersed, but we never forget that the latter are ever in reserve, and are always present, if not seen; even as on a stormy night in March the mass of drifting clouds may only now and again part and show glimpses of the pure, star-lit blue beyond, and yet we know that the heaven and its stars are there always, however long they are obscured to us. "Then they that feared the Lord . . . they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." There are the glimpses of the deep heaven beyond the storm and the wrack, and the true prophet is he who makes men feel that in his message they are never far off, and that with his own heart they are not out of tune. Tenderness; yearning; pleading; the anticipation of the words of Him to whom they all pointed, "Why will ye not come unto me that ye might have life?" "My yoke is easy and my burden is light. I will give you rest for your souls": all these make up the true prophet's method and tone. Hope for the hopeless, blessing, restoration, happiness for all who will turn, even at the eleventh hour—this is the prophet's cry. Hope is his medicine, nay, his very

food for men. To be dissatisfied with themselves and with everything about them is no doubt the first stage, and must needs be, in the restoration of a corrupted and worldly nature. But to leave it at that stage ; to leave despair and discouragement in possession of men's souls ; to knock down their effete beliefs, and not to give them any guidance, or any principle, or any offer of divine co-operation in their task—this is to leave men in their sins, seeing them, perhaps, more clearly in their ghastliness, but inclined to accept the situation, not to rise and struggle against it.

In this respect, then, my brethren, as in some others, we perhaps shall do well to revise our notions of the prophetic ideal. We are to remember that to remind us of certain truths that we have forgotten, even though they be valuable truths, is not enough to constitute a prophet. It is help, comfort, hope, and inspiration that we want, even more than knowledge. It is well, for instance, that amid all our doubts and perplexities we should feel strongly the dignity of work. It is a comfort to know that when we are labouring faithfully in our vocation—all of us, the divine, the student, the physician, the merchant, the artist, the mechanic, the humblest servant—we are both helping on the world and

justifying our existence. If we have forgotten this, let us be grateful to any new teacher who should remind us of it. Unquestionably we are the stronger and the happier when we know and feel the truth. Still, it may not be in itself a sufficient gospel to regenerate the world or the individual. Again, it is good to know that in the doctrine of the equality of all men, and their equal capacity for exercising power, may lie a falsehood as dangerous as there is a divine truth in the equality of men before God, seeing that the doctrine of equality may end in closing its eyes to the unquestionable inequalities—those of virtue and capacity and desert. In a sense it is true that all men are equal; in another sense they are profoundly unequal. And the doctrine, that the less able and the less virtuous is as fit to rule as the more able and the more virtuous is (as has been truly said) “a hatred that wishes to pass itself off for a human kindness.” It is a great truth that if we could find the noblest and wisest to lead us, and then should agree to let them lead us, we should indeed be on our way to be a prosperous and virtuous nation. But the truth is perilously near to being a truism and a platitude; and the moral teacher in whose scheme this is almost the solitary gleam of light can hardly be called a prophet, since

the question of questions has still to be asked and solved—How are the bulk of us to be trained to recognise the best and the wisest when they appear among us? It is mockery of our desires and yearnings to be told that we are all wrong ; that the world is going to wrack and ruin ; that all our efforts after reforms in Church and State and social arrangements are futile and hollow, and that we are only sinking deeper and deeper into the slough of despond, all because we will not recognise the best men among us and let them rule us. It is mockery this, if that is all that is offered—if the humblest, poorest individual is left widowed of hope, and with no offer of a divine helper who can lift him above himself.

We want *hope* to counteract the gathering cloud of despair or discouragement ; we want *life* to quicken the dull deadness of content that is wrapping us around. We want the prophet's voice of love and tenderness to draw us from this torpor or this apathy. We want some one to build up a creed and a hope for us ; not one merely to burn up with unquenchable scorn the errors we have committed and the false ideas we have formed. And we shall have done something towards amending our condition if we study again the type of the old Jewish prophet, and determine that we will honour and



follow as their true successors those who preach and work most closely in their footsteps. The true prophet is the true worker after the manner of Christ. Christ was a true prophet when He raised a dead conscience from its grave, as much, nay, far more than when He denounced the hypocrisies of the Pharisees and predicted the downfall of Jerusalem. Christ delivered men by rekindling their hope. That is how we must deliver them, following humbly in His steps. By tenderness, by patience, by sympathy, that is how sinners are converted and the faithless are made faithful. This is the note of the prophetic office. This is the prophetic temper and the prophetic spirit. Where these are not, let us turn away and seek them elsewhere, even at the very fountainhead of compassion and truth.

“Stir up, O Lord, the *wills* of thy faithful people.” The last Sunday of the Church’s year dismisses us with a warning against mistaking the real secret of our sins and sufferings. Not lack of knowledge, but paralysis of will is the universal malady. “If to do were as easy as to know what ’tis good to do!” Alas! yes. The knowledge is so in excess of our power to act that we may well pause in the cry for more light, and turn to those who will encourage us in the struggle for more life.

The prophet is he who best serves us in our efforts after life ; who sings in our ears that there is hope for all who will turn and be saved. Hope, because there is a God, and one who is strong to deliver, one who desires that not one of us should perish, one who notes not only every achievement of ours, but every struggle, every effort, every aspiration, even though they fail ; and will lead us on here and hereafter to the perfect enjoyment of His perfection, who declares, with the same accents as when He spoke to Malachi, that unto those who fear His name shall the Sun of Righteousness still arise with healing in His wings.

## XV

### THE TALENT IN THE NAPKIN

“And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin : for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man : thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.”—LUKE xix. 20, 21.

A KEY to most of our Lord's parables lies in the occasion which called them forth, and this is no exception to the rule. “He added and spake a parable” (the one before us), we read, “because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought” (that is, the disciples thought) “that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.” The people were looking away from the present into some obscure future. They were expecting a “kingdom of God” to appear, and to appear immediately. What did they mean by the term? If the Saviour had asked any one of these expectant followers what idea the term “kingdom of God” conveyed to him, what do you suppose the man would have answered? A

display of supernatural power from heaven, protecting the believers and crushing their opponents; making the truth evident and to prevail; making virtue triumphant, and laying vice prostrate in the dust; enabling each adherent of the Messiah to say, "You see we are right, and you were wrong"; and ushering in a reign of universal prosperity, corn and wine and oil without stint, no more pain or suffering or anxiety for the soldiers of the new Ruler? One may reasonably suppose that the idea of a "kingdom of God appearing without delay" meant something very like this to the crowds who followed Jesus, because after eighteen hundred years we are sure the idea means much the same to many of us. When we are feeling with some unwonted despondency the riddles of this painful earth; when the unchecked existence of sin, and misery, and pain, and all other evils, is borne in upon us with some new poignancy; when some fresh piece of evidence seems to point to the world getting worse instead of getting better; when we ourselves are dull, and weary, and faithless, and the instinct is to cry, "How long, O Lord, how long?" and to sink down in the dust and abandon the unequal struggle; if we think, "O that the kingdom of God would only immediately appear," I fear that if we were required on the instant to

explain what we meant by the expression, we should have but a vague answer to give, we should prove to be crying out for something as to the nature of which we could bring little material for judging. The triumph of God's cause, the defeat and destruction of all evil, the final disappearance of all our doubts and difficulties, and the final confirmation of all our old opinions which the infidel had assailed so long, and which we had had such difficulty in maintaining,—I think that this is very much what we should have to answer if we were asked on the instant what we meant by the kingdom of God. A few vague generalities—nothing more. The kind of vague generalities that bring no healing to the wounds of life; no access of strength to bear its burdens; that have, in fine, no spiritual virtue.

I think that our Lord, then, was quite as much bent on instructing the disciples on this important matter of what the kingdom of God is, as on that other matter of the particular time when it was to appear. You will find that the distinction here indicated marks all His teaching, and that of His great apostolic preachers. The thoughtless and unspiritual crowd were always craving one class of information, and Christ was always bent on giving them quite another kind. They were always

wanting to know the *when*, and the *where*, and the *how*. He was ever labouring to make them understand and appropriate and profit by—the *what*. They were craving, in their cowardice or their faithlessness, or even in mere curiosity, for signs and wonders; or for definite events to happen; or for certainties as to times and seasons. If their thoughts turned to a "*kingdom of God*," it was because it would effect some change for them from without; it would do for them something that they could not do, or had not done for themselves. But the Saviour had a quite different view of the kingdom of God. It was not that it was of less importance in His eyes than in theirs, nay, it was of infinitely more importance. But then He meant by it something infinitely different. They thought that the "*kingdom of God*" was something a long way off, but yet which God, at some particular season, would bring nearer to them. Christ knew, and taught a widely different thing. "Lo," He said, "the kingdom of God is within you."

And therefore, I say, when Jesus narrated this parable to the crowd of eager listeners, because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear, He was teaching by means of it a lesson as to the meaning of the kingdom of God, quite as much

as a warning lest they should anticipate too soon the arrival of this kingdom. In the form of the parable, no doubt, it is the time of its appearance that is dealt with. The certain nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom, and to return, is of course the Son of Man coming upon earth for a short time to be acknowledged as the Lord and King of men's spirits. He called to Him ten servants. We do not know of any special significance in this number. Probably there is none. He said to them on leaving the country, "Occupy" (our version has it), but more in accordance with modern idiom, "employ, administer, trade, till my return." He gave them each the same sum. Each received one pound. We know, therefore, how the pound is to be interpreted. The eternal message, the divine Gospel to men's spirits, the news of a Father, a Saviour, a Sanctifier, the awakening of man's sense of need, and the consciousness of his being made in God's image, in order to conform to that image. This was the pound. The nobleman leaves the country where the majority had refused and rejected him. He passes to his home elsewhere, and leaves the pound in the hand of each servant to administer. When the times were ripe he returns. "He commanded those servants to be called unto him, to whom

he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading." You all remember what follows. The actual words, at least, are familiar enough ; but let us not miss any of the deepest truths involved in them. The first came and said, "Thy pound hath gained ten pounds." The second, "Thy pound hath gained five pounds." And the servants were then rewarded proportionately to the skill and success of their administration. Now, no one could wish to limit the vast and far-ranging scope of the truth here shadowed forth. All human life, as a whole, and in its component elements of power, talent, faculty, grace, opportunity, is a gift given us to trade with. We are sent into this world to invest the life given us in a profitable way. Life is given us to do the best with it, and make the best of it. It would be cramping the divine parable to refuse its aid in understanding this fact and applying it. God gives us life ; and if when He reclaims that gift, we are able to plead that we have helped forward the cause which He most loves ; if we are able to say that we have left the world in any way, or the smallest, humblest corner of the world, the better for that life ; if we have given to other men and women cause to be thankful that we have lived, because we have in any



way and degree commended to them the character of Christ, and the kingdom of God, then, in a sense, certainly not alien from the spirit of this parable, we are able to say that the pound we have been entrusted with has gained much, and much that God wishes it to gain, in the use we have made of it. In a sense, most surely, and a great and blessed sense, the pound has gained ten pounds, or five, and He who entrusted it to us will surely say, "Well done." I say, one cannot exclude from the Saviour's parable this very obvious application of it. There are gifts of various kinds, such as wealth and genius and ability, which we receive in trust for others. The man who having large wealth, spends it in churches or hospitals, or missions or schools, invests it (if he has used it wisely) so as to produce great returns tending to the good of Christ's little ones. In a sense he has made material gifts produce in return gifts of far more value than money. Another man with the same wealth spends it on himself, on his own luxury and tastes and comforts, or squanders it on the race-course or in gambling, or other wholly unproductive results. In a sense, the one man has made ten pounds out of his one pound, and the other man has made nothing of it; or less than nothing, for he has made it an instrument of evil.

All this is obvious; and the parable being by its nature of infinite comprehensiveness, may be allowed to remind us of such truths as these. All that we have, in which resides the power of working good or evil, spreads and multiplies by being invested. But let us, on this occasion, confine ourselves to that application of the parable which may be least obvious, and yet is the one most strictly deducible from the story. The pounds given to trade with produce—what? Other pounds. Like produces like. The thing traded with is increased. Accept the lesson boldly, The pound given alike to each of the ten servants is the gift of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit which the Father gives to all who will accept it. This is the "pound"; if it has gained by our use of it ten pounds, or five, what can it mean, first and chiefly, but this,—that more of the spirit, more of the fruits of the Spirit—joy, peace, love, and all goodness—have been gained. "Like," remember, always "produces like." The first object and use of God's Spirit is that it shall more and more abound, more and more bring forth fruit. It is on this, the most literal deduction from the parable, that I would ask you to dwell. We are all offered the same sum to trade with. The same capital is put in our hands. To each of us "a pound." To

each of us the love of God, the forgiveness through Christ, the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. What shall we do with it? That is the awful question. It comes to us as a germ, like the kingdom of heaven, a grain of mustard seed, which yet has the capability of becoming a great and fruitful tree. The metaphor of little becoming much occurs over and over again in the Saviour's teaching. It pervades that teaching, so that we shall never lose sight of the great law of spiritual development. How to make the one pound many? Use it; trade with it; take it into the world's markets and employ it. That is how earthly riches become greater, and the law is universal beyond the region of commerce. All that we have becomes greater, stronger, by use and by exercise. All faculties become more vigorous by exercise. The limbs, if unused, dwindle and fail in strength. Memory becomes surer and stronger by being exercised; taste becomes keener and more refined; all talents and endowments improve by being taken out into the open field of human association and competition, and there brought into play. The whole analogy of nature is on the side of the same thing being found true in the realm of spirit. And Jesus tells us that the same is true. Use the gift of gifts, and that gift is multiplied.

But, you reply, how can we, by our trading, make that more which is a free gift of God? If God's inspiration comes from Him, and Him alone, how can our poor efforts multiply that gift? It is one of the paradoxes of the kingdom of heaven that we should be able to do this; but it is absolutely certain that we can and may. The gift of the "pound" is to all who will accept it. But how differently the offer of it strikes different persons! It falls, indeed, upon natures variously prepared for using it; and to different eyes it presents different degrees of attraction. It is only as it is used that it begins to reveal its value, its blessedness, and its capabilities. Till we have done something with it, or allowed it to do something for us, its use and beauty are alike latent or dormant. Light may shine upon us for a long time, and we may refuse its aid, but when once it has shown us something that we had not seen before, it may startle us into the perception of a whole world of vital truths.

Let the offered "pound" be but brought to bear upon our true selves, deep hidden below crusts of long habit, of prejudice, of pride, of self-sufficiency, perhaps of long ingrained disobedience and sin, and it multiplies upon the spot. A faith that seemed interesting and pathetic only in the morning, may

by even-time have become a stupendous fact of our lives, an absolute necessity of our being, if in the interval it has been applied to interpret one of the deep, inalienable conditions of our poor human nature.

There are those who hesitate to make any effective use of the pound given them. They might indeed see what it may become, and does become, in the hands of other persons. They might see that to thousands it gives goodness, patience under suffering, strength against temptation, happiness, and a peace that passeth all understanding. But they can also see (and this they prefer to dwell on) that to as many others, or more, the pound invested produces religiosity, pietism, on the one hand, and on the other a decent acquiescence in the customary religious forms, and that with these results all profit seems to end. The pound does not generate a larger, more active morality, nor a livelier spiritual temperament. Why, then (perhaps they ask for themselves), should they trouble to invest their pound in what brings so little adequate return? "What is the good of religion?" they ask. God gives it, but it does not seem worth their trading with. "And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou

takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow." The murmurer against God is here indicated. An austere God, harsh, inequitable, requiring from our suffering and labour what He might (if He chose) give us without these things ; a capricious God who makes it so easy for some of His creatures to be good, and so difficult for others ; an unfair God, making us responsible for the tendencies, and passions, and frailties with which He sent us into this world. This is how we complain, while the "talent" is lying hid in the napkin, and we are doing nothing with it. Cause and effect seem reversed here, but so it is. We think that God is against us, is unreasonable in His demands, or imposes responsibilities that are not rightly ours. We think it, just because our pound is lying idle. It is the spiritual faculty lying dormant within us that produces the querulous and suspicious attitude towards God. It is when we are not doing our part that we complain most that God is not doing His. It is while the talent lies idle in the napkin that God appears to us an austere being, asking for a harvest where He appears to leave all the labour of it to His creatures.

The lesson, then, seems not hard to apply. It lies with us to make much of what to our hasty and

suspicious glance seems so insignificant. We have not much light (we complain, perhaps) whereby to guide us in this dark and difficult world. Let us admit that the world is dark and difficult. God knows that it is. The path of duty is rugged and painful, and the voices that cry to us, urging us to give up the struggle, are many and bewitching. The light that God allows us may seem a faint glimmer and uncertain in its issues. But let us use it, and all at once it becomes brighter and more convincing. To use our pound is the one only way to make that pound more, to multiply it five, ten, fifty, a hundredfold. You young men, who are halting on the threshold of your independent lives, halting between the two voices—the voice of affirmation, which says, “*God is*, and there is no welfare but in knowing and serving Him,” and the voice of negation, which says “there is *no God*,” or there is no certainty, or there is no hand outstretched from eternity to help our doubtful and faltering steps—at the very moment when you are pausing ere you make the final and decisive choice, there is in your hand, in your heart, in your moral consciousness, in that soul which you try to ignore, but cannot, there is a gift of God—the “pound” which He offers to all His creatures. What will you do with it? What

will you do with this glimmer of dawn, this intimation that duty is above all else; that it is the only good thing to do good to others, and to keep yourselves unspotted from the world. This may be the only sense in which you have realised that God has placed in your hands a pound to trade with. The moment is yours, to turn this intimation into the certainty of a paramount conviction. There is only one way of doing this. Trade with your pound. Take it out into the world's markets and put it to use. If it is borne in upon you in however faint a whisper, in the most tremulous breathing of a divine Spirit, that it is good to be just and pure and tender, helpful to others and careful of self, act upon it. If it is certainly good to be loving and just, be loving and just in the first relation of family and society that presents itself, and the conviction will be henceforth more certain and more immovable. Goodness justifies itself in the doing of it. "Do the duty that lies nearest thee," said the wise man, "and thy second duty will already have become clearer." Yes, deeply true, but the first duty will also be a deeper, greater, wider, and altogether a new thing. The man in the parable put his pound away from him; he hid it out of sight. He did not even live upon his moral capital. If he



had he would not have grown in moral stature. He would have started from mediocrity and never have got beyond it. So it is with many of us. We possess a stock of small graces and virtues. We think they will do to get through life with ; we do "get through" life with them. The phrase is expressive enough, and sadly describes the colourless and fruitless career that results. We begin as moral weaklings, and we end as such. Nay, the parable assumes a more sombre, a more awful shape towards the end. There is no such thing as remaining on the same moral level. Unless we use our pound to increase it the pound itself dwindles away. "Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given ; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him."

This is the awful law of human opportunity and human responsibility. Trade with your light, your knowledge, your conviction. Do not keep straining your eyes to the horizon for the kingdom of heaven to appear. The kingdom of heaven depends upon you. It is yours, if you will but accept God's offered life, and live it. For unto him who works, and feels he works, the kingdom of heaven is ever at the doors.

## XVI

### LIBERTY

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption : for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”—2 PETER ii. 19.

ST. PETER is telling his hearers, unknown to us (for there is much in this Epistle which is left obscure and uncertain, both as to time and as to the particular persons addressed), that just as in the earlier stages of Jewish history there were always false prophets contending with the true for the ears and hearts of the people, so it was still in those first Christian days, and so it would be until the end of time. This is, briefly, the topic and the moral of this Epistle. The writer entreats those who have accepted Christ, and already received into their hearts the germs and seeds of true Christian grace, to beware of the false teachers, the false prophets, who already had begun to undermine the heavenly Gospel by plausible and seducing arguments—

plausible, because in the stating of them it was easy to give them some sort of resemblance to the teaching of Christ Himself; and seducing, because the temptation offered was to make religion an easier thing; and whoever comes forward to do that is sure of a large and responsive audience. The temptation offered in this case was clearly what theologians call "Antinomianism," that is to say, the attractive doctrine that grace being accepted and faith established, the "law" might be allowed to take care of itself—which means, might be regarded as of quite insignificant importance. Among much that reads strangely to us in this Epistle—much that sounds even incredible, as having come to pass while the memory of Jesus Christ was yet so fresh—this is the story which we are enabled to make out. It is doubtless strange to note the sudden and extreme transitions in the writer's topics, as well as in his tone and manner, from the purest, loveliest graces of Christian faith, to the darkest tempers and depravities of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is strange, I mean, to hear the earnest exhortations to add virtue to faith—and knowledge to virtue—and thereto, temperance, patience, and brotherly love—and then, within a very few sentences, to gather that already the false teaching

of rival religionists was inducing many to suppose that not only were such graces and virtues practically superfluous, but that a man might consider himself somehow a Christian while he was setting at nought the commonest moralities and decencies of every day. For this is evidently what the new teachers were sounding into ears only too ready to accept it. The Gospel has superseded the law. The law has no longer any claim upon your obedience. St. Paul and others have told you that men are saved by faith, and not by works. Cling to the faith, therefore, and never mind the works. "*Peccate fortiter*"—show by your conduct that it is not works to which you are trusting. Jesus Christ came to set you free. Show by your actions that you are free indeed, and that you can do what is right in your own eyes.

Such was evidently the doctrine that had proved so popular; and there are sad and appalling passages in this Epistle that show us how the instruction had been followed. A frank and free lawlessness had set in; and all the while those who had adopted it were fondly imagining that they were Christians yet. Who can wonder that the writer's tone grows stern and even bitter? Who can wonder at this fresh illustration of the immortal

truth, that there is nothing so corrupt as the degeneration of what is good ; and that "lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds" ? "Liberty" was the alluring word these teachers traded upon—"liberty," which as we recall the word when heard from the lips of the Saviour and His true followers, declares to us the deliverance of the creature from all the bondages of sin and death to which he has been before subject ; the setting free from all those fetters of man's devising, by which he had been thus far hampered—from whatever swaddling-clothes and leading-strings he had needed in the infancy and childhood of his moral growth—from whatever limitations had been necessary for him in the gradual education of the race or the individual ; liberty which comes with wider, deeper knowledge, seeing that it is the "truth that makes us free,"—this was the glorious and divine word which these dark-souled intriguers against righteousness were profaning and prostituting to basest ends.

And now times have changed, and if such teachers are still in the land, infusing the same poison into the souls of men, it is by other, more sagacious, more subtle paths. The day for the open propagation of Antinomianism has passed away, perhaps for ever. Except in the most ignorant and

fanatical of sects, the doctrine that it does not matter what we do, seeing that we are saved beyond all possibility of reprobation, is not heard. But it would be a dangerous mistake to suppose that all danger on this score is passed, and that we can afford to set at naught or neglect the warnings of this Epistle. No one to-day dares to preach the unimportance of the moral law. The man who did so would disgust and alarm at the outset, and would be listened to no further. But the glories and the delights of liberty form a topic that will never lose its charm. And the danger of preaching it, even where no "Antinomianism" is deduced from it, or even intended or wished to be, is just this—that if preached without its due explanations, it will leave us to make our own deductions, and these must needs be coloured by the tendencies and weaknesses of each particular individual. It depends entirely upon what tree the blessed gospel of liberty is grafted—upon what soil the seed is cast—what fruit it is destined to bear. "Add to your faith, virtue; and to your virtue, knowledge," says this true apostle of old—and we need precisely the same counsel to-day. "Liberty may be a blessing," but not such as many of us "have conceived it," unless we have learned certain other truths with equal distinct-

ness. Liberty, indeed, is not of necessity a blessing at all. The blessing depends singly and solely upon the use we make of it when we have got it! The liberty to do good is one thing. The liberty to do evil is quite another. The freedom from all hindrances to doing God's will is the freedom that is regarded as the crown of all blessings in the pages of the New Testament. But with many of us there is but a single step to that perverted view of it, as the liberty, not perhaps actually "to do what is right in our own eyes," but to choose our own ways and times of doing our duty of helping our brethren, and even of keeping ourselves, as we imagine, "unspotted from the world." Yet in all these things, in all methods, helps, furtherances towards the good and right, there must be a right and a wrong way, or at least a better way and a less good way, and if we find ourselves glorying in our own freedom to choose what and which way we will pursue, we may well pause and fear lest the glorious doctrine of freedom of will may not lead us far from the goal of excellence. There is an anecdote told of the great and good Samuel Johnson—how he came one Sunday to this church, and heard Dr. Gregory Sharpe, who was then Master of the Temple, express great anxiety in his opening prayer for our liberties,

and the dangers accompanying them. "Sir," said Johnson to a friend afterwards, "our liberty is in no sort of danger; he would have done much better to pray against our licentiousness." Doubtless Dr. Johnson scented in the words of the preacher something that offended his old Toryism; but, in the largest acceptation of the terms, how true and how necessary his criticism! "*Licence* they mean, when they cry Liberty," John Milton had said long before; and it is against the same too easy parodies of the glorious word liberty that St. Peter is warning in the text: "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption." For surely the suppressed argument of the writer is just this: "Your new teachers are urging on you that your Christian liberty is in danger. But judge for yourselves, from observation of these teachers and their lives, what is the value of the liberty they extol. What has the doctrine done for these teachers themselves? These men who are urging you to break away from the old restraints of the old religion—who are telling you that Christ has set you free, and that you may start afresh with no laws, rules, customs to fetter your action—what is the net result of this doctrine upon the teachers themselves? Can they bid you look at them as proof



that a tree may be "known by its fruits"? Can they plead that their "liberty" has made them humble, sweet, truthful, and pure? St. Peter tells us, on the contrary, that the physicians had not healed themselves—that, on the contrary, they were loud talkers, vain boasters, and lax, terribly lax, in their morals!

Now, as I have said, the preachers of liberty are, in these days, more guarded in their language, more subtle in the temptations presented. But indeed such teachers from outside may not exist at all for us. The most dangerous voices that cry, "How glorious is liberty!" "How pitiful a thing to be in bondage to rules and regulations!" are within us, not without,—the plausible suggestions of our poor, shifting wills. The idea that there is something Hebrew—something of the Pharisee—in turning conduct into a series of rules, is very acceptable to many of us. There is something singularly attractive in the idea of love superseding law—of spontaneity taking the place of regulations! And, no doubt, if the love and the spontaneity did the same work as rules, and did it much better, we should have reason indeed for our boasting. But if, as sometimes happens, love proves to be an emotion which evaporates into sentiment, and spontaneity be a good resolution which is here to-day and gone

to-morrow—why, then, the hardest and fastest rule may be more salutary to ourselves, more beneficent to our fellows. Better do what is right by rule, than not do it at all. Our Lord did not even rebuke the Pharisees for their careful attention to the minutiae of service. When they tithed mint, anise, and cummin, He did not blame them for that. He only blamed them for what they had failed to do. “These things ought ye to have done, but not to leave the others undone,”—the other things being such trifles, in the Pharisaic view, as charity and mercy. If we cannot safely trust our charity and mercy to the care of spontaneity, why, then, let us be charitable and merciful by rule. If we cannot trust our instincts that way to run alone, why, then, let us put them in harness.

Yes, spontaneous goodness—the result of a love in us that cannot fade, but burns every day and every hour with “an unerring light”—is a blessed thing. But which of us is sufficient for it? The reverence for God that expresses itself in every action of our lives—that makes prayer “rise like a fountain night and day,” is a blessed thing; and the mere custom of observing Sunday as a day of worship may easily degenerate (as we are careful to note in our neighbours on all sides of us) into the

most perfunctory and unstimulating of routines ; but I would fain ask those who have in consequence abandoned the traditional habit in question, whether they thenceforth found the spontaneity of reverence and gratitude grow in them. By renouncing the slavery of habit, have they thereby weakened the slavery to indolence, to selfishness, to worldly personal habits? No! It is not by getting rid of rules that we are richer in the "Christian liberty" to serve God and live better lives.

We have learned in our day that the habit of unthinking almsgiving—that is to say, the survival of habit, unenlightened and unwarmed by knowledge and by thought for our brethren's real good—has worked often grievous harm, and injured those whom it had thought to serve. And the reaction from this error is in danger of leading us into error even worse in the other extreme. Almsgiving, we say, and with justice, is not true charity ; and it is a pleasant and attractive corollary to say, "Then let us leave it alone for a season." But that is not the reaction that Jesus Christ wished to encourage and to develop. Habits of charity—even by means of our money—are still our one protection against the sentimental charity which wishes well, but does nothing to further the wish. It is not the less

necessary to remind you of this great truth in a Church which affords no regular and ordinary means of collecting the thank-offerings of its congregations. Perfunctory church-going is a sterile thing as regards ourselves ; but what shall we say of a church-going which is sterile also as regards the poor and suffering? It has been my custom to tell you once a year to what purposes I devote the offerings made at the holy communion—the feast of gratitude for the highest of all blessings in this church. I shall distribute, at the close of this year, our year's collection—it is not much thus far, only some fifty pounds—among three admirable institutions: the East London Church Fund, and our Inns and Courts Mission in Drury Lane, and King's College Hospital. There must be many—yes, the large majority of this Temple congregation—who, not being communicants (at least in this church), have no opportunity of making any offering towards a charitable object except on one of the fifty-two Sundays in the year. If there are any who believe, as I do, that worship without offering must needs be a hollow and unmeaning sacrifice, they can if they will have the privilege of contributing to the three objects I have named—all of them connected with this East End of London where we are placed. Any

contribution sent to myself, or the *Temple Offertory Fund*, at Messrs. Child's, Fleet Street, will be allotted as I have mentioned.

You are startled, it may be, at the introduction of the words responsibility, rule, duty, in connection with a Church service which is free as air to most of us—where we come and go, and are commonly asked for nothing in return. Do not imagine that I am seeking to abridge your Christian liberty. I am only seeking to substitute one kind of liberty for another. The service of God, so the Bible declares throughout, is alone “perfect freedom.” If there is one thought that more than another pervades and animates the teaching of St. Paul, it is that we must serve something, some one, and that on our choice in the matter depends success or failure, happiness or misery. And this applies at least as certainly to our charities as to anything else. Shall we make rules—which is indeed being a servant—or shall we be content to be at the mercy of our shifting and precarious impulses, as to the strength and duration of which we can promise nothing? Let us take heed lest while we are rejoicing in a fancied liberty we are all the while the servants of our corrupted wills—“for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”

## XVII

### JUDAS

“Holy Father, keep through thine own Name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy Name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.”—  
JOHN xvii. 11, 12.

THE words are part of that unspeakably profound and solemn utterance, recorded by St. John alone, in which the divine Son outpoured His latest prayer for His disciples when the final scene of His earthly life was about to open. The reference in the text is, of course, to the fidelity of the disciples, who were still His in heart and mind, for all their special weaknesses and temptations, contrasted with the one awful defection, the apostacy of Judas Iscariot. He, of course, is the “son of perdition”—a phrase the meaning of which is sufficiently clear, though it might be difficult to replace it by any English idiom of the same brevity. “Perdition” means the state or condition of “being lost.” The Greek word

is the substantive of the verb just before used "none of them is lost," and the point of the antithesis, therefore, necessarily disappears in the use of the word perdition. It would be a cumbrous way of preserving this antithesis; still, it would preserve it, were the English version to run thus, "None of them is lost, but he whose very nature it was to be lost"—he (that is to say) whose insensibility to the divine touch, whose irresponsiveness to the heavenly discipline, made it a certainty that he should fall away. The phrase occurs once elsewhere in the New Testament. It is used by St. Paul in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians, of the chief power of evil that should appear in the world, the veritable Antichrist: "Except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the Temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." To whom or what the apostle referred in this passage does not concern us on this occasion. Enough to perceive that he points to the antichristian, the antigodlike nature, the contest with which is the supreme and all-important contest ever in progress in the world.

Judas Iscariot, then, is described for us by his

Lord, and Judge as the un-Christlike nature—the nature which fell away under temptation because its natural gravitation was in that direction. Every incidental allusion such as this may well be welcomed by us as a help to understanding the character and the downfall of the unhappy man as to whose career the Scripture is so reticent, and round whom it throws such an atmosphere of gloom. For in spite of the simplicity of the circumstances attending the final act of treachery, and the fulness with which they are narrated, I suspect that there is no career in history for which we find it more difficult to account than this of the betrayer Judas. We seem to need fuller information as to the earlier part of that career. We are willing to believe that he was no exception to the general rule that the extremity of baseness is not reached in a moment, that the devil-nature does not possess itself of a human soul “at one stride.” And therefore one could have wished to be able to trace some of the steps in that downward path. But no material for this purpose is vouchsafed to us. Until the very eve of the great crisis in the traitor’s life he is little more to us than a name.

Now, this is the more significant, because it is not the way of the evangelists to suppress the unfavour-



able side of the characters whose history they have to tell. It is a familiar observation that the recorded incidents in the lives of the Twelve are quite as often illustrative of their defects or ignorances as of their virtues and intelligence. The cowardice of Peter, the intolerance of John, the incredulity of Thomas, the impatience of Philip—these evidences of weakness are so bound up with our recollections of these persons, that we cannot put them away, or form our impressions without them. And yet if we cannot say of such failings that they “lean to virtue’s side,” we can say that they mostly suggest pity or sympathy, at least, and that these emotions bespeak the depth of the interest which they excite.

If one promises more than he can perform, it is from an undue confidence in his attachment to his Master ; if another is fiercely combative, it is from excess of zeal ; if another is hard to convince, it is because the stake he thinks at issue seems to him so great. We can look upon such delinquents, and looking on them, love them—in a spirit which we may trust we have learned from their and our Master. And, moreover, the traits thus recorded are just of that kind which enable us to deduce from them, as it were, the whole man. They are each a small arc, but they are enough to construct the

whole curve from. We seem to know many of the apostles, small though the aggregate of facts may be which are recorded. But until the end of these three memorable years of the Saviour's public life nothing is told us of Judas Iscariot; nothing of his call, nothing of the motives that had induced him to heed that call. John Bunyan, you may remember, assumes boldly that he joined the party of Christ at first from interested motives. Speaking of those who (as he says) make "of religion a stalking horse, to get and enjoy the world," he goes on, "Judas the devil was also of this religion: he was religious for the bag, that he might be possessed of what was therein." And again, "So surely as Judas designed the world in becoming religious, so surely did he also sell religion and his Master for the same." But whatever the likelihood may be, there is no jot of evidence to show that Judas "designed the world"—that is to say, had worldly aims in view when he became religious. We know the end of his apostleship, we know nothing of its beginning. We know him, up to the last great apostacy, only as an office-bearer. He was the steward, the bearer of the bag, for that small and humble band. When Jesus whispered to him at the last supper, the others supposed that he was receiving instructions to make

provision for the coming feast, or to make some grant from the common fund for the poor. He had, we must presume, the business faculty which pointed him out among the apostles for this duty. He had a turn for figures and the methodical habits which made the others leave their simple finances with confidence in his hands. And he first breaks the silence in which his disposition had been shrouded in an exclamation of surprise at an action affecting, however remotely, those considerations of economy which he was charged to consider. When Mary of Bethany anointed the Lord's feet with costly ointment, it was Judas Iscariot (according to St. John) who murmured, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?" this he said, adds the evangelist, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, "and bare what was therein."

This marks, no doubt, the beginning of the end. It was an indication of the encroaching spirit of greed—the mercenary temper, which, however begun and fostered, was eating into the man's nature, and making the way natural and easy for the last bargain of his life, the compact for the thirty pieces of silver. But the question will present itself, Was the gaining of this sum a motive, by itself, adequate to the crime?

Here was a man, of whose past career indeed we know nothing, but who had certainly cast in his lot with an unpopular cause, and had lived certainly in constant danger from popular opposition, and most assuredly a laborious existence, supported only by the bare necessities of life. There was never any compulsion resting upon him to be a follower of the Lord, or to continue in that relation longer than he chose. He could have deserted from the service at any time, at small cost in popularity; at small cost as a worldly sacrifice. For we cannot believe that, in his position as treasurer of the common purse, he had contrived to make anything like a fund for himself. St. John calls him, indeed, a "thief"; but we can hardly construe this that he had pursued a career of embezzlement, and had been actually making a money-profit of his apostleship. We cannot suppose that Jesus would have suffered such an element of systematic wrong-doing to exist in immediate contact with Him and His cause. The evil nature He could endure, because it was such natures that He meant His own nature to convert or purge away. But the evil act He could never have sanctioned, even by toleration. The spirit of selfish aggrandisement may have been growing in this man (and it is this

which makes a man deserve the name of a thief in as true a sense as if he had committed daily larceny), and it is not necessary to suppose that the gain of the thirty shekels of silver was the last of a series of self-enriching acts. It may have been even the first time in which he had converted his spirit of greed into actual money-profit. But he may have been a thief long before he began to steal.

You see, my brethren, that with every wish not to go beyond what Scripture tells us in estimating the characters displayed there, we are driven upon conjecture in any attempt to make them intelligible to us. We must use such phrases as "may have been," such limitations as "probably" and "perhaps." Nor is there any harm in conjecture, if we try to build it upon the eternal and well-proved laws of human nature. There must be some clue to even such a character as Judas; there must be some consistency in it—it must have some organic unity if we can but trace it. Now, since we cannot find all we want in what is recorded of a character, is there not also something to be learnt from what is not recorded? Why is the life of Judas such a blank up to the time when the actual collapse sets in? We cannot understand the evangelists suppressing anything about him because, when they wrote, he was a

discredited and abominated personage—may not the simple explanation of their telling so little be that there was so little to tell? Is it not consistent with what experience teaches of such natures that he was, long before the final surrender, a sullen and silent person, because after the first spasm of conviction had passed that had led him to connect himself with the Saviour's cause, he found himself in a false position? This is the impression which the actual blank in the narrative of Jesus and the Twelve, which this man might have filled, leaves upon my imagination. Whatever is told of his brother apostles, however little in amount, shows them as sympathetic and social beings—as having some warm blood in them, of zeal, or indignation, or anxious doubt. They appear as taking some interest in the cause they had identified themselves with. One hears of no trait in Judas that suggests the social or the sympathetic nature. The silence of his voice, in the sacred narrative, seems to figure a corresponding dumbness of nature, as of a man brooding on himself—dissatisfied with himself—at war with himself. Every day he was witnessing acts of mercy and love, listening to words that sounded all the depths of the human soul, and yet finding no response in himself to them—irritated by them, because they had but

this one burden, "Let no man think on his own things, but on the things of others," while he was dwelling ever on himself—how *he* should profit if the cause were victorious, how *he* might suffer if the cause should fail. It is this utter loneliness of spirit to which, it seems to me, the Scripture silences point—the loneliness of selfishness—the loneliness of

A still salt pool, locked in with bars of sand,  
Left on the shore ; that hears all night  
The plunging seas draw backward from the land  
Their moon-led waters white—

all his companions in sympathy with their Lord, spreading truth, health, and comfort along the parched highways of life, while he was self-absorbed. We cannot think of such a man as talkative, or as doing or saying more than the chances of each day made absolutely necessary. But of this we may be also sure, that this state of suspended purpose could not long endure. The love that he may once have given to his Master could not linger long in this atmosphere of discontent ; when once it ceased to draw him, its magnetism would soon begin to repel. And it is deeply significant that the first and only criticism we find him passing is one that claims a higher moral insight than his Master's. When love and gratitude lavished costly gifts upon the

Saviour, he, the antisocial, the unloving nature, discovers that his attitude is really more indicative of love than the thoughtless adoration of the crowd. "This ointment might have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor." The hard, unloving nature plumes itself upon a higher charity than the enthusiastic reverence of an emotional woman. This is very significant and wonderful. The narrow and self-contained spirit constantly discovers that its prudence—its "nicely calculated less or more"—is the true measure of devotion and religious obligation. This is an everyday experience. St. John assigns the reason with unmeasured scorn—"He said this, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief." There was no love in his objection, nothing but the carnal mind, the "palsied will," and the "jaundiced eye." His love to Jesus was quickly passing into hate. The best, when corrupted, becomes the worst. The angel in him (and there must have been an angel once, telling him of his needs, his sins, and whispering of the beauty of holiness and the sweetness of reconciliation) had been driven out of him—and now Satan entered into him, and the end was near.

I cannot, my brethren, understand such an expression as that in our text, "None of them is lost



but the son of perdition," save on some such explanation as the foregoing. I cannot think that "son of perdition" would have been applied by divine lips, save to a being in whom the germ of apostacy existed from the beginning, and in whom, therefore, the final and astounding act of treachery was no "new departure," but a natural development. The moral of it, as it concerns us, should therefore not be far to seek. We are apt to wonder that one who had been so long in the companionship of the good, and true, and loving could make such utter shipwreck. Our wonder is misplaced. To be in contact with the true and good, and yet to remain unpurified by it, may constitute the actual hardening process which kills a soul, and turns even the natural attraction towards the light into a hatred of it. Thirty pieces of silver was an inadequate reason, we argue, for betraying the best of men, and wrecking a cause which had already worked such beneficent results. Yes, but the bribe of the moment was but the opportunity; the mine had been laboriously laid through many a month, and wanted but some favourable conjunction of circumstances to spring. When we see men betray the cause of Christ (this is, of course, the modern equivalent of the sin of Judas), the final temptation may seem paltry enough, but

the question is, What preparation has been going on for the defection? When a man's faith is surrendered in order to gain the applause of clever companions—well, the laughter of wits is a poor thirty pieces of silver for which to give up the cause of Christ—but, in fact, the surrender has been going on long before. The so-called faith has vainly thought that it might exist among the sights and sounds of Christian love and excellence, and yet never be quickened by them. It has been a passive faith, and a passive faith is a dead faith. The faith that is antisocial, anti-sympathetic, that in no way diffuses itself, is in no communion with God; and without that communion cannot retain any hold over the will and affections. We cannot reproduce the disaster of Judas in form, but we can betray Christ in a thousand ways; we can be religious, and not be moral; fight about faith, and yet make shipwreck as to charity; sacrifice everything to money-making, and yet vainly hope that our real treasure is in heaven; be wrapt up in self, and yet deem that we have in some way or other secured salvation.

Let us turn from the gloomy picture to the serene and tender language of the Saviour's prayer—"Holy Father, keep through thine own name those that thou hast given me, that they may be

one as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name." And He would have kept Judas, but it was of the very nature of the man—the son of perdition—that he preferred the sullen loneliness of independence. But he could not preserve this sullenness to the end. There is nothing more tragic in the annals of history than the outcry of the awakened conscience when his real isolation flashed upon him. "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." And how lonely he was, was emphasised yet once more by the brutal retort of the chief priests, "What is that to us? See thou to that." He was alone now indeed, and he could bear the light of the kindly sun no longer. "He went out and hanged himself."

The sullen nature, living among Christian views and acts, and yet unmoved by them, does not always end in this agony of awakening. The Judases of common life die with consciences comfortably callous,—so our experience of men would seem to tell us. Let us not be too sure. We little know what awakenings take place in the secret chambers of the heart; in what forms a betrayed Saviour appears, when it is too late, to the betrayer. Let us turn from the thought of Judas's last hours, and think more how we may move among the

company of Christ as those who draw their daily inspiration from Him ; as those who, because they love Him, though they may be weak and frail, shall yet never fall from Him in this world or in that which is to come.

## XVIII

### GALLIO

“And Gallio cared for none of those things.”—ACTS xviii. 17.

GALLIO, the pro-consul of the Roman province of Achaia, has been subjected, like many other characters of history, to certain marked changes in public estimation. He has been over-abused and over-praised, over-attacked and over-defended. It has been, perhaps, to the accident of the use of a particular word in the English translation that his ordinary reputation has been due. “He cared for none of these things” is an ambiguous phrase, including, no doubt, the indifference of a sceptic as well as the impatience of a judge towards matters over which he has no jurisdiction. There is nothing, ~~I think~~, in the Greek words to exclude either interpretation. But then there is nothing to decide for one rather than for the other; and it is hard upon the Roman judge that the epithet “careless,”

so easily formed out of the phrase "cared nothing," should have become so associated with his name that he has become almost a byword for the most unfavourable view that can be taken of his character.)

And, of course, one extreme has led to another. Historians and critics have not omitted to point out how unjust the world has been, and how worthy of our highest regard this most upright judge really was. He was a Roman and a pagan—(they say)—his business was to decide in civil cases or in criminal, not in ecclesiastical. "If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters." He had no jurisdiction—that is the single plea of his defenders—and having none, he was right to dismiss the charge with something of impatience at the time of the court being thus needlessly taken up. In the only sense in which he can truly be called "careless" of such questions, it was his duty to be careless.

Perhaps there are no materials available for forming a confident judgment on this difference of opinion. But there are certain indications to be drawn, both from St. Luke's narrative in the Acts

and from facts which we know from other sources, as to the character of this man Gallio. Let us look first at the brief narrative before us. Paul was at Corinth, the capital of this province of Achaia. He had been in Corinth at least eighteen months, working at his own trade, and preaching every Sabbath day in the synagogue, making many converts. His success made the Jews, who remained unconverted, furious. They "made insurrection with one accord" against him, and brought him before Gallio, the deputy, with the charge, so familiar in substance ever since: "This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law";—by the law, of course, meaning the law of Moses. Gallio seems to have listened to the case of Paul's accusers without interruption. We may infer this from St. Luke's words: "And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews." It was not until the accused was about to reply that the judge interposed. He did not care to hear the defence, not because the charge had broken down, but because it ought never to have been brought into that court. The case was stopped. There is no need to infer that it was stopped with any expression of anger or insult because of the words "he drove them from the judgment seat." It is

evident that there was much disorder attending the whole proceedings. The Jews, who had conspired with something of violent measures to arrest the apostle, were evidently a tumultuous body. The Gentile population, who hated the Jews, were evidently represented by a crowd of spectators, not less tumultuous, and on the delivery of Gallio's judgment, it is very likely that the exasperation of the accusing party and the contemptuous triumph of the Greeks at the discomfiture of the alien race, occasioned a state of things which the use of some degree of force by the lictors was necessary to suppress. From what follows, indeed, the state of things is made even more certain. "All the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat." [Sosthenes was presumably the leading man among Paul's opponents, and the Corinthian idlers present were so delighted to see him baffled, that they could not refrain from mobbing him, with kicks and cuffs, in the very presence of the judge. And it is at this point in his narrative that St. Luke chooses to insert the memorable remark, "And Gallio cared for none of these things." ]

*slowly*  
*over* ~~I confess that~~ the position of ~~these~~ words, even more than the words themselves, does seem ~~to me~~



to give colour to the popular view of Gallio. In the first place, it seems to follow the mention of the violence of the Gentile crowd, as if some explanation would be expected as to why Gallio did not interfere to protect the Jewish prosecutor. It seems as much as to say, "The mob used Sosthenes very roughly, but the pro-consul took no notice." And perhaps this was the case. ] An educated pagan in those days did look upon the Jews with mingled suspicion and contempt; and though Gallio may not have had any more real sympathy with Paul than with his accusers, still it would be natural for him to see malice and intolerance defeated in its object, and the stronger party for the moment baffled. He may have been amused to see the popular sentiment a trifle roughly expressed, and have thought that he might win a little popularity by winking at the expression of it. And, in the next place, if all that St. Luke meant by the words of our text was that Gallio had no jurisdiction in such matters, the remark seems superfluous; for Gallio had himself made the same statement in words immediately before reported. "I will be no judge of such matters." On the whole, then, the general impression left on the reader is one not varying very much from the common estimate of

Gallio's nature and disposition. ~~We~~ often err, I think, in our judgments of character by supposing that only one class of motives is at work under certain circumstances. It may be the case with Gallio that he honestly fulfilled his judicial duty under these circumstances, and ~~yet~~ that at the same time he did not pretend to conceal his contempt for the whole class of questions brought under his notice. He may have been an upright judge as to the merits of the case before him, and yet have been a notable instance of sceptical indifferentism. Perhaps he was both, and St. Luke may have wished to accentuate both. ]

However that may be, nothing that we know of Gallio from other sources is inconsistent with this view. The few facts of his life that we possess are not without significance. He was the brother of the famous Stoic philosopher, Seneca, and uncle of the hardly less famous poet, Lucan. He finally resigned his post of pro-consul because of an attack of fever, which he attributed to local causes. The country did not agree with him. The one feature of his character which seems most to have impressed his friends was his extreme amiability. *Dulcis*, the "pleasant," the "agreeable," was the epithet which he contrived to earn for himself. There are two

descriptions of him that have come down to us from his contemporaries which are very striking, both from their epigrammatic turn, and because they seem to apply to such a large class of character still existing in society. Statius, the Roman poet, said of him that "everybody loved him a little—even those who could not love him much"; and his brother Seneca wrote of him that "nobody ever was so agreeable to a single friend as his brother Gallio was to all the world." Now, it is impossible not to recognise a certain touch of sarcasm in these ostensible tributes of praise. They seem to point to that kind of amiability which makes a man popular without making him respected, and to that range of amiability which is rather wide than deep, and is able to diffuse smiles and graciousness of manner all round, which if it seldom makes an enemy, as seldom makes a friend. If these two sayings about Gallio were deserved, it seems as if we can at once construct his character from them. And there may be a connection, not remote, between this trait of general agreeableness, this habit of making things pleasant all round, and that claim of tolerance, or as the world has called it, of indifference, which the incident of our chapter recalls to us. If by the phrase to "care for none of these things" we are at

liberty to understand a half-pitying, half-amused contempt for the religious questions over which men fight and wrangle, then it is quite in accord with our experience of human nature that this temper of mind should be found in company with other qualities very attractive and endearing, as far as they go. The man who is shocked by the extremes of party, or who is amused by them, or assumes a position of general willingness to tolerate them, is usually a popular man, and passes for an amiable one. His toleration is accepted as a phase of his amiability. He is popular because he is not much in earnest. Earnestness is not the road to popularity. To be in earnest means to be in pronounced opposition to many things and many persons. It will win love, no doubt; respect and reverence from those who can appreciate it, who are in harmony with its aims and objects, and who can recognise the beauty of a soul giving itself out for a great cause; but the loveliness of the earnest character has little in common with the amiability of a Gallio, which appeals to all alike, and means nothing because it costs nothing. And in all times of religious earnestness there will be religious excitement and the development of strong antagonism between thinkers of opposite schools.

Party will become a marked feature of religious history, and it will not be difficult for any one who stands aloof from the disputes that are agitating religious society to discover and point out the falsehood of extremes. In a time of excited religious feeling *Gallioism* (if we may coin the word for our convenience) becomes a prominent type of virtue. To "care for none of these things," whether it be in a good-natured way, or in an ill-natured, is adopted as the motto and badge of a large section of society. To be shocked by the extremes to which men go, or into which each party succeeds in forcing its antagonist; to be amused by the things (which seem to the critic so trivial and insignificant) about which men fight;—this is an easy and natural position to take up. It commends itself to a varied class of minds; and because it is easy, it is sure to command a wide popularity; because it has a show of largeness of mind, and superiority to prejudice, it is sure to win approval; and when it is expressed with something of suavety and humour, it gains credit for amiability—that amiability which, like Gallio's, makes men liked a little even by those who cannot like them much.

And, my brethren, let us be just even to the Gallios of the world. Do not let us be led to return

them sneer for sneer; to see *no* sense in them, because they can see none in the disputes of Church party. I cannot deny that the temptations to Gallioism are great and constant. We are most of us (whatever our private views and opinions) sorely tried at times by the sight of party-leaders fighting, as if for dear life, over things of which we cannot recognise the importance, or even the significance. It would be absurd to ignore the fact that such a state of things exists at the present moment. The world does not consist only of men and women of extreme views, and pledged to take a side; it includes a large number, by no means of the stuff of which Gallios are made, who feel a hatred of extremes because they honestly believe that they obscure the truth and are fatal to sobriety of judgment, and who wish to serve God, and to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, if so it might be without even hearing the sound of dispute, of accusation and recrimination. And when such as these read daily of men who are prepared to break up the very fabric of a church, unless they are allowed the use of certain vestments at a particular service, I say that there are many—not Gallios—who are offended, and are aware of many a passing temptation to doubt whether this form of religious earnest-

ness is connected with that which they have learnt to cherish and adore from the Psalms of David, the Sermon on the Mount, and the sublime spirituality of a St. John. My brethren, I use this illustration merely as an illustration. In all ages of the Church have been found points of difference which would have done as well. I am not seeking to declare my own opinion on such points, or (at the present moment) to help you to form one. I would merely point out the poisons and the cold chills that are in the very air we daily breathe. There is a constant temptation to us to dismiss the quarrels of religious men from our thoughts, not in anger, or in scorn, but because they hurt us; because they do not harmonise with some part of religion which is nearest and dearest to us; with the example and teaching of Christ—with the memory of dear relatives and friends in whom religion was a lovely thing—with conquests achieved over self-interest or passion, and sorrows transfigured and sanctified by the presence of the consoling Saviour. To be hurt and pained by religious strife for these reasons is not by any means to be a Gallio. We are hurt because we are in earnest, not because we are indifferent. Between those who are thus wounded in the most sacred region of their affections, and the

man of the world who laughs at the whole thing as beneath the attention of a reasonable being, a wide gulf is fixed.

Nor is it of these last that I am speaking to-day. They cannot be reasoned with because they are *not* in earnest. Their indifference is not the fruit of a genuine hatred of extremes, but of a universal scepticism. The pretence that they have discovered religion to be a mere "question of words and names," or of law, ecclesiastical or other, is a mere pretence. The distinction they would fain be thought to draw between questions of morals and questions of doctrine, as if they were deeply interested in the former, but not in the latter, is also a pretence. No one who is in earnest as to whether the world is growing better or worse ; as to whether his friend, or himself, is nearer and nearer to the heart and mind of Christ, can look with disgust, still less with contempt, on the strife of party, though he may look on it with sorrow and disappointment. But it is such as these last who are hurt at the sight of things so dear and sacred being bandied to and fro, and made the topic of popularity-seeking formalists and humorists, and who are desponding, and discouraged, and anxious for the future: these need, and deserve, all the guidance and reassurance that



can be offered them, lest they also should drift into the Gallio-stream of losing all care for these things. They will not do so if their first labour, their "prime care," is to keep the communication between God and their own souls open and continuous. For this will teach them, first and foremost, that religion cannot die from any cause except man's wilful hardening his heart. Quarrels about ritual, or predestination, or eternal punishment, may rage upon the surface of the great ocean of human nature, but in those depths where God and the soul meet and commune these things do not, cannot, make their way. We know that the best of those who are fighting most desperately for the views they value are giving their life's toil to bring men into the way of righteousness, and to fulfil Christ's command, "Feed my sheep." The knowledge of this may not affect—ought not to affect—our judgment of the abstract value of the things they fight for. It is a foolish argument that we sometimes hear used, that men are surely not wrong in this or that practice, or this or that opinion, because they devote their lives to succouring the poor! God has not promised to protect the most devoted of His apostles from intellectual error, and from the mists and deviations that colour or divert what Bacon called the "dry

light" of reason. I only would urge that true religion and undefiled, which visits the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and keeps itself unspotted from the world, is not less common in the world—it may be more common—because of the diversity of opinion and practice which prevails. Diversity (as has been often pointed out) is a sign of life ; it is when that life is fading that religious society seems to be sicklied over with the pale cast of uniformity. And thus, in the presence of men fighting for questions of the law—for names and titles—idle things as they may seem to us—or at least things with which we cannot sympathise—it is not necessary to despond as if God had forsaken His Church ; or to turn from the sight in the Gallio-attitude of scorn. For remember well that the Gallio position is a position of mere negation, and in negation is no virtue, no power. The amiability which smiles with impartial contempt on all the windy ways of men is a poor, unfructifying thing. Woe to that man whose single religious virtue is universal tolerance. To say that it is an amiability which makes no real friends is nothing. It is an amiability which does no work ; which never helped the possessor of it to one victory over his lower self, or helped him to make another human being happier. Whether the Gallio of

history deserves this to be said of him I do not know. We have better tasks before us than to settle an interesting historical problem. Enough for us that the thing we call Gallioism is a fashion and a snare; that it is a pretentious substitute for religion—not religion itself; that the extremest devotee of party, weeping over his own unworthiness, or giving himself in any way to help his brothers, is dearer to God than all those who smile and criticise—and do no more. We want positive teaching, not negative; a positive life, not a negative—if we are to kill error and replace it by truth. By whatever process we have come to know the blessedness of God's service and the need of Christ, if we have come to know it, then verily we can afford to smile at extremes; for we are at one with the redeemed of all schools and parties, the Church within the Church.

## XIX

### CHRISTIAN COURTESY IN THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON

“Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer.”—PHIL. I.

THE Epistle to Philemon stands distinct among St. Paul's epistles by its brevity and by the private and homely nature of its contents. It stands conspicuous by a display of mingled wisdom and delicacy — what may perhaps be safely called “Christian tact” — which is only more conspicuous here than in other parts of St. Paul's writings, because it is applied to a theme so unlike those upon which the apostle usually found himself called upon to write. Unlike all his other letters, it is of a purely private nature, written to a private friend and on a topic of no public interest. Its very insignificance in this respect made the canonicity of the Epistle a matter of objection in the early ages of Christianity, and St. Jerome found himself bound

to argue against such objectors. And indeed the short letter is quite devoid of theological importance: we learn no new fact from it; we are furnished by it with no new weapon in defence of truth or in the conviction of error. All we do see in it is the display in the writer of the "mind that was in Christ Jesus," at work upon one of the many problems that life and intercourse with men in the world are always presenting for solution. No one can complain that such display is superfluous. Considering how large a part of our everyday association with men is occupied with such problems, how much thought and anxiety have to be brought to bear upon them; how easy it is to take the wrong course instead of the right; how easy to let personal considerations modify, almost without our suspecting it, the dictates of actual duty; considering also how much more fascinating to most men are the refinements and mysteries of faith than the effort to make our Christian faith bear upon our Christian practice;—considering all these things, we shall hardly venture to pass this scripture by as beneath the attention of a Christian congregation.

Philemon was a Christian gentleman of means, residing at Colossæ. Onesimus had been his slave, but had escaped from servitude, had somehow

come under the influence of St. Paul's teaching, probably during the Apostle's first imprisonment at Rome in A.D. 61 or 62, and had been converted to Christianity through that influence. ] The sole and simple object of this letter to Philemon is to entreat him to receive back his fugitive slave, now a Christian; to forgo all such penalties and claims as he might otherwise justly have enforced against the runaway; to blot out the past, and to admit his former servant into the new relation of friend and fellow-worker in the cause they now had equally at heart. On the mere statement of the facts, any one can see how difficult and delicate a task St. Paul was undertaking; for Philemon had clearly suffered a wrong. The legalised relations between master and servant had been violated by that servant—for what cause, or with what circumstances of excuse, we are not told; and in addition to the loss of the slave's services, there had been other outstanding debts due from slave to master. At least St. Paul seems to hint something of the kind in verse 18: "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account." The master, Philemon, had unquestionably a grievance; for had he been in the first instance to blame, had he been a hard or unjust master, we can have no

doubt that the Apostle would have rebuked, as boldly as he here pleads and exhorts; and this grievance nothing had occurred in the interval that had elapsed to heal or to remove. But the offending servant had undergone a change through becoming the disciple of St. Paul—a change which transformed him as a man. This change had given him so new and sacred a relation to the Apostle, that the latter calls it by the most endearing of all relations: “I beseech thee for *my son* Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.” If a new affinity had thus been created between the great Apostle and teacher and an insignificant slave, the Apostle might well urge that his former master would be content to acquiesce in a like change, and to recognise in his old servant a fellow-helper, not less helpful because the new tie was to be one of Christian fellowship. The delicate play upon words with which the writer illustrates his appeal necessarily disappears in our English language. The word “Onesimus” in Greek means *profitable*, and the writer urges that the free devotion of Christian liberty will be a far more real profit than the compulsory service of his former state.

Now, if we knew nothing at all about the man Philemon, we should guess some of the difficulties of

the Apostle's task. He was asking one who has been wronged to pocket up his wrong, to dismiss at once all vindictive feelings, and to receive back his injurer on the footing of an equal and a fellow-Christian. But we do know something—we know much—about Philemon directly or by inference. He was a Christian in more than name. His correspondent calls him “dearly beloved” and “fellow-labourer.” He says he has heard of his faith and love which he had to the Lord Jesus and to all saints. “We have great joy and consolation in thy love,” he says, “because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.” Language such as this tells clearly that Philemon was one who had learned Christianity much as St. Paul himself had learned it. The receiver of this letter evidently understood by the “mind that is in Christ Jesus” much the same that the writer did. But supposing the Epistle contained no such words, no such tender and touching Christian compliment, there would still be no lack of evidence as to what manner of man Philemon was. It is sometimes said that a man's nature and character are shown quite as clearly by the letters that his best friends write to him as by those he writes to his friends; and the present letter is no bad illustration of the



truth. For what would have been the use of the Christian tact here displayed—the high-minded tone, the delicacy, the tenderness, the playfulness, the pathos of it all—if it was to fall upon the heart and conscience, or, rather, the absence of heart and conscience, of some vulgar worldling? Surely no use at all. It speaks a language that such a nature could not understand, and does not know the rudiments of. Look, for example, at the consummate tact shown in this one passage of the letter. “I send you back,” says the writer in so many words—“I send you back your old servant. I would have kept him with me as a most valuable helper to me in my present distress, but” (let us quote his exact language) “without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.” I would not do it, that is, without your consent, because I should have robbed you of the privilege of doing a good action spontaneously. As a mere compliment, what adroitness and finesse is there not here! But as an act of Christian courtesy how much higher rank it takes. It was Coleridge, I think, who said that St. Paul’s manners were the finest of any man’s on record, and this letter goes far to show it. But it tells us

also much of the man to whom it is addressed.

[ This letter is almost as great a credit to Philemon as it is to St. Paul. What a tribute, only to have had such a letter addressed to one! ] Fancy a man who looked at the relation of master and servant as a matter of business, into which sentiment should not be allowed to enter, who knew only that he had suffered a wrong, and could see no other side to the transaction—fancy him being suddenly asked to put aside all such considerations, and, furthermore, to forget all the barriers between class and class that he had been used to regard as the very necessaries of life, and to shake hands with his old servant as a friend and equal. There might be some balm found in the words of verse 18: “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.” St. Paul could have said that to whoever he was writing to; but surely not that which follows, “Albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me *even thine own self* besides”! St. Paul’s avowed maxim was to “become all things to all men.” And he certainly always adapted the tools he used to the work they had to do. It was because Philemon was Philemon, that Paul wrote to him in this strain. To another than Philemon—to a boastful asserter of his own rights, to the man who

would have his pound of flesh, and not one jot short of it, he would have written (we are certain) with Christian charity and with Christian tact, but it would not have been in this language, or with these arguments. For this apostle knew well when to strike hard, as well as when to spare. He knew when to rebuke, as well as when to plead, or to entreat. Himself the very model of Christian courtesy, there is nothing in him of that spurious charity which aims at putting all persons on good terms with themselves. Nor was his the familiar instance of the "iron hand," as it is called, in "the velvet glove"; getting his own way, asserting self and self-will, with a suave smile and a bland utterance that never varied. The "velvet glove" was off when he withstood Peter to the face; it was not on his hand when he "delivered over to Satan" Hymenæus and Alexander, that they might "learn not to blaspheme." He knew when to spare the bruised reed and to refrain from quenching the smoking flax: his object was to heal, to strengthen the maimed and the weak, but also to break down the stubborn wills, and to bring light, if it must be so by violence, to darkened hearts and dormant consciences.

Therefore in St. Paul's epistles, as in other parts of Scripture, we find the law to hold that Christianity

is a wisdom, not a set of rules. [The Epistle to Philemon is a most touching and beautiful illustration of the spirit in which the most prosaic things of human life may come to be treated between men when they can trust each other to be animated by the mind of Christ. There is nothing picturesque or romantic in the complication which called forth the letter ; but the complication involves questions of right and wrong ; of duty and charity and policy ; and immediately that the " mind of Christ " is brought to bear upon them, they are transfigured into beauty. Within the small compass of this short letter, and on a topic of quite private interest, see how all the powers of the writer are drawn forth : powers of intellect, of invention ; the faculties of eloquence, of fancy, even of humour ; the emotions of love and pity,—all come trooping forth, vivified as it were by the light and warmth of the gospel of Christ ; and all steeped in a light which is palpably different from all other. What a beauty there is in goodness, is one of the first convictions forced upon us by reading this letter : a beauty, we might go on to say, quite as worth dwelling upon and analysing,—yes, and teaching to our students,—as the various forms that men are thronging, as at this season, to judge with eye and ear in the art galleries and concert-rooms of our

great city. Only the beauty, in this case, is the flower of which goodness is the root. The growth cannot be reversed. To make a Christian gentleman, the development must be from the heart and spirit outwards, not from the manners inwards. To have shown us a picture of one such gentleman writing to another, when no thought was present to the writer that it would ever be read by a third person, this Epistle to Philemon cannot be called superfluous, or unworthy to form part of a revelation of God to man. It is a worthy supplement to the more elaborate epistles which expound the deep mysteries of the faith, for it shows how such mysteries are not shadowy and unpractical, since they bear one blossom of the truest Christian courtesy.]

Let us pause upon one or two of the lessons of comfort or inspiration that flow from it. And one is, the happy and most blessed truth that association with the good helps us to be good, by drawing out and calling into play all that is best in us. [It was the sweetness and loving-kindness of Philemon's nature that encouraged St. Paul to address him with these persuasions, and to trust that he would do what was right and loving in this difficulty.] St. Paul confesses so much. It were absurd to say that Philemon's goodness had called forth Paul's. The Apostle could

not help being noble with whomsoever he had dealings. But it was the sense of sympathy with Philemon, and of Philemon being in sympathy with him, that made the Apostle thus open out to him with such a prodigal tenderness, instead of using the tone of stern commandment. Goodness draws out goodness. And I speak now of men who are not St. Pauls, who are very far removed from such a height of spirituality, and who let their better nature too often dwindle and starve within them for want of the intercourse with a nature like-minded, to call it out, and foster it with the divine warmth of sympathy. There are many methods by which we can weaken our hold upon the kingdom of God ; but one way is to have no one to sympathise with us. John Wesley put the matter with his characteristic simplicity when he said, " You cannot go to heaven alone ; you must either find companions or make them." Faith and love cannot exist among men in a stagnant condition ; they must pass and repass in order to retain their virtue. We must give and receive. We want companions to whom to impart good as well as from whom to receive it. Besides, we only believe in goodness, only understand it, when it is associated with some actual living, breathing nature. Our thoughts of goodness, sweetness, unfailling

faith, connect themselves with friends or others, from whom we have learned these more perfectly. Have we not found this? have we not known some person, or persons, to be with whom, to talk with whom for an hour, makes things real and blessed to us which we had hardly known before were more than the items of a creed? Such is the power of Christian fellowship.

Secondly, let us learn the truth to which this epistle bears witness yet once more, the truth taught in the Sermon on the Mount, that "blessed are the meek." Until we have studied history, and have come to know something of the world from personal observation, we may misjudge the terms of this beatitude. We may have supposed it merely consolation offered to those who had to bear persecution—a promise of future reward to those who have to suffer in the present. But when we come to watch the lives of men and women in the world, we come to see that the *meek* of the earth are the *strong*. Meekness is the easy attitude of him who knows himself to be brave and strong. He can afford to be courteous, because he is not afraid lest it should be mistaken for weakness. Look at St. Paul in this passage: "I might be bold," he says, "to *enjoin* thee what is convenient, yet for

love's sake I rather beseech thee." He is willing to surrender the triumph of the granted request to his friend. He is willing that the sense of obligation should rest on himself. The world says, or thinks at least, even if it is shamed into silence, "What cringing, what unworthy subservience is this!" Yet we know this meekness to be sincere, utterly genuine, and therefore precious. And it is sincere because he who thus exhibits it is one of the strong men of the world—strong to dare, strong to execute, strong to endure. The ages of romance, imperfect and one-sided as was their ideal of manly virtue, had seized hold at least of this truth, that the bravest knight was ever the meekest. The Lancelots and Calidores of fiction, like the Bayards and Sidneys of history, do well to stand as witnesses to this truth. "The sternest knight to his mortal foe that ever put speare in rest" was also the "curtiest knight," "the truest friend," "the meekest man and the gentlest." But the courtesy of the Christian springs from a yet deeper root than that of feudal chivalry. It is, like the other, the mark of the strong man, but he is the strong man because he is inspired by charity, and has learned to ignore self. Our self-assertions and vanities; our delight to stab and sting our neighbours; our paltry jealousies and



rivalries ; our dread lest our claims are overlooked and others get too large a share ;—all these things which make the intercourse between ordinary men so different from that between Paul and Philemon, —what are these but signs that we have not studied in Paul's school? Social etiquette may prescribe and enforce our manners, but they are little more than skin deep. Social etiquette has no power to put charity in our hearts and meekness in our lips. These come, believe it well, from another source. These come from the knowledge of Him in whom we have believed. They come from the love and reverence which He first taught the world was the due of every human creature, because he or she is the child of God, and because the manhood has been made sacred by being taken into God. To feel this reverence is the hardest of all hard things ; for all evil things are in revolt against it. Pride, prejudice, selfishness, are ever in antagonism to it. It is this which explains the supremacy accorded to charity ; which accounts for sayings so startling and so mortifying as this, " Hereby we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren " ; or this, " He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ? " Our "*charities*," as we call

them—our doles here, and our doles there—our miserable percentages upon our income ; these are but a drop in the ocean of our responsibility. “Charity” is great because it includes every other virtue—our humility, our patience, and the constant exercise of Christian wisdom ; a life’s study, and a study which with all our labour we shall only imperfectly master. But for that reason I see nothing incongruous in the thoughts which arise out of the letter to Philemon being fit subject for our meditation in the season of the Ascension. From the risen Christ to the homely topics of this epistle may seem a gulf indeed ; but depend upon it that there is the closest connection between the one and the other. For whatever Paul felt and wrote, he felt and wrote because Christ lived within him ; and because in doing the humblest service to Christ’s servant, it was to Christ that the service was done.

## XX

### THE RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF LETTER- WRITING

“All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord : whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts ; with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you : they shall make known unto you all things which are done here.”—COLOSSIANS iv. 7-9.

EVERY now and then it chances, as to-day, that for our second lesson we have some concluding chapter of an epistle of St. Paul in which, after the serious business, the more important topics, of the letter are done with, the writer turns aside quite naturally to greetings, messages, and other merely human and friendly interests, natural between intimate friends, or teacher and pupil, or any two parties interested in each other's happiness and welfare. The essence of Scripture, as a revelation, might seem to have passed for the moment out of Scripture, so prone are we to think of Scripture as something quite above and

apart from the ordinary intercourse of human beings. And one can imagine some devout persons regretting that an opportunity has been lost, and that such exceptional portions of the Bible should be retained for Sunday use, and should not have been exchanged for something instructive and bracing from a theological point of view. But this is a narrow and inhuman view to take of Scripture: inhuman, because it is reluctant to recognise that mere sweetness, tenderness, and courtesy (because for the moment theological topics may not happen to be under consideration) are closely akin to and savour of true religion, such as it is the whole object of revelation to diffuse and foster. And it is because I believe that we can learn much from St. Paul even at such moments when he is least occupied in commending particular mysteries of the faith, that I think it a pity to lose the lesson of such moments, whatever it may be. For when we speak, in technical language, of the concluding chapter of an epistle, we mean, after all, the final sentences of a letter; and the very miscellaneousness of the treatment, the hasty gathering up of kindly thoughts, feelings, recollections, greetings, and messages, is none other than the type of thousands of other letters daily passing now between those for whom letter-writing

is the one only means of keeping old affections and friendships closely knit, of preserving the mutual action and reaction for good, of man upon man, in free and wholesome exercise. It is, in short, the religious aspect of homely, everyday letters that is naturally suggested by our lesson, and perhaps we have seldom given the subject its due consideration, considering how large a part in our lives is filled by the sending and receiving of letters ; and though the large majority of letters, so called, that pass among men, are of hardly any moral significance at all, seeing that they communicate bare facts, or merely messages bearing no mark of the individual writer, and possessing no spiritual influence whatever, yet there is another class of letter, by no means small or insignificant, that we have all at times written or received, that has had material effects for good or evil on ourselves and others—effects blessed, or the reverse of blessed. For letters are nothing more than “words,” with the addition that they are words uttered with more deliberation than the spoken utterance, and they must therefore be subject to the same law of responsibility that our Lord so solemnly laid down for the latter. If by our words we are justified, and by our words we are condemned, it must needs be that our written words follow a like

rule; indeed our responsibility may even be heavier for the written word than for the spoken, seeing that we give the words, by fixing them on paper, a permanence that the others have not, and that above all (a circumstance too often fatally overlooked) when received by the eye alone in the inexpressive medium of ink, they lack all that interpretation or commentary which the tones and inflections of the speaker's voice, and the glance and play of his features, supply to the spoken word. And for this reason there is room for the exercise of the highest Christian qualities of wisdom, tact, and charity, in this matter of deciding what things should be spoken and what written, that we may have to communicate. As we all look back upon crises in our own lives, in our quarrels and disagreements, in those "painful duties" which every one of us has had to discharge at some time or other, those duties which we would all fain shirk or devolve on others, and yet which we must face, or live "cowards in our own esteem," we are fortunate indeed if we have not to recall many a mistake made, arising out of this matter of the use of the written word. For it has happened, how often, that we said the thing that would have been better written, or wrote the thing that would have been better said!

Yes, my brethren, I am sure that if once we begin to reckon up our moral failures or successes in the past, we shall be surprised at what an important part letter-writing has played in them. For, even as our daily speech, this letter-writing has often served as the vehicle and reflection of every side or mood of us : it has reflected us often, alas ! at our worst ; and often also, thank God, at our best. It too, like all other gifts from Heaven, has its uses and its abuses. It has been, at one time, the chosen means of expressing men's direst spite and malignity ; at another, of imparting all his sweetness, love, and desire to do good. What a wise letter ! what an unwise letter ! what a good letter ! what a bad one ! has been our comment, how often, on these varied uses of the thing ; and our admiration or condemnation in each case deepened by the recollection of the old adage, *Litera scripta manet*. A letter lives on, unless destroyed, to bless or to curse, to draw men nearer together, or keep them wider apart. What a picture might be drawn, if this were the place to do it, of the malignity of some letter-writing, of the unhappy persons who quarrel by correspondence, and even (such is one of the penalties of evil-doing) acquire a taste and a passion for it, so that it becomes with them something akin to the fascination of a

fine art, to choose the right word, and the phrase, so decorous, so harmless and polite on the surface, so poignant and provoking at the root, to express their subtlety of malice. For there is nothing so inventive and so ingenious as malignity.

But then again, lest we should grow misanthropic by that recollection, let us recall that other end of the scale: let us recall the tenderness and consolation, the sweet counsel and encouragement, the assurance of sympathy, the strengthening of the deepest ties of love and unity of which letters have formed, and every day form, the vehicle. For there are often things too solemn and too tender to be spoken, too sacred to bear the light and touch of speech, which may yet be committed, in the solitude of writing, to paper, and opened by another in another solitude, and so do their blessed work. What good have we not found, what soft healing in times of suffering and sorrow, from such letters! What good may we not have done in our turn—a good which, like all charity, blesses alike the giver and receiver. In solitude, I say, for in such cases it is of the essence of such messengers that they travel from one lonely spirit to another, with no human witnesses. And these, too, live on, and keep their virtue; and among other many necessary documents



of the past, these are preserved, and sweeten all the rest, like lavender; these old letters to which we turn, in sad or happy moments, and read again the past, find the dead living again in them, and renewing to us the blessing of their former selves.

And in this, as in all that is good, St. Paul is our model and exemplar, although his letters were written mostly with a definite didactic purpose, and abound in mere theology. But, for all this, his letters are genuine letters in our own sense of the term, for they are full of himself; and just because they are so true to himself, they differ materially according to the persons and characters of those he is writing to. It is of the essence of a genuine letter that the writer reflects in his tone and manner and language something of the peculiarities of those he addresses. So different, and yet so always the same, are St. Paul's letters, when he writes to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Philippians, or to a private person, like Philemon. Two things only are there invariably: the passionate love of what is lovely and lovable, of everything honest, pure, and of good report, and the passionate love of souls. Three things we may say, for the "charm" (if we may use the word) of St. Paul's letters,—may we not add, the charm of all letters,—lies in this, that the

writer not only loved souls, but this and that individual soul; that while yearning, as his Master had yearned before him, for the crowd and the multitude, the vicious, the ignorant, the superstitious, the uncared for, he had his special loves and friendships, and could care for Tychicus, and Onesimus, and Epaphras, and Luke the beloved physician.

There is a religious aspect of all these things that we too naturally overlook in our haste to understand mysteries, and fortify perhaps our confidence in a particular school of opinions and *views* ("views," the most worthless of objects for which so many people sacrifice their lives). And one great loss, irreparable, that we suffer by our increasing neglect of the Bible, is that we cease to have before us the example of a man like Paul, living not in an atmosphere of dogma, but in an atmosphere of love and duty that was as much a development of his belief in Christ as was his theology. It is the religious necessity, and sanction, and lovableness of little duties and responsibilities, of the things that in their aggregate make life liveable if accepted, and not liveable if rejected, that is one of the blessings and privileges of keeping in touch with these first teachers of Christianity. And it is difficult to believe, if the religious sense decays or fades from

out large classes of society, that these little virtues (little, but oh, how great!) which make to many of us the charm of existence, which amidst all the evil in the world, and the discouragements that abound, still keep hope alive, because they witness to something or some one that is their Origin and Prototype;—it is difficult to believe that something of as much importance as the religious sense, if indeed it is not another name for the same thing, will not gradually die away also. There are signs enough about us, we must sadly agree, that where religion is rejected by a household, much else of the beauty and sweetness of life passes away also. We hear people affirm, to all appearance honestly believing it, that though the observance of religion became a thing of the past, all the old virtues, duties, courtesies, reverences of life, would be found to survive in their old strength, that it would then be seen that these things were not the growth and fruit of religion, but that man can still develop them out of some other root, and in another soil, and by a different kind of training. It is hard to disprove such assertions by pointing to individual cases. The fostering warmth that has been brought to earth by the example and recognised presence of Christ in the world during all these centuries, does

not and cannot be lost in a day, or a year. The room continues warm, for a while, even when the fire is extinguished on the hearth. But, without religion, there are certain things that it seems must undergo a change, "into something *poor* and strange." It is incredible that, if the reminder of certain old standards of duty be no longer with us, we should not adopt other and lower standards. The enormous weight of selfishness, a law of gravity always tending to drag us downwards in the scale of virtue, is a force we shall for ever have to reckon with. To do what suits ourselves best, to make conventions and regulations as to conduct that shall best conduce to our own convenience, will be always a constant factor in the moral progress, or decay, of society; and we know what ugly signs there are about us of many kinds,—signs of revolt against any one being obliged to do anything he or she may not like to do; the calm putting on one side of any duty or responsibility to bear and to forbear, to have patience and charity, to accept trials and seek to make the best of them, and conquer them by bearing, instead of repudiating. It is this kind of temper that, if it spread and be intensified, might prove to be as disastrous a solvent of social bonds, and therefore of social health, as anything we can

conceive. For the whole fabric of society is kept together, and kept beautiful, only by its being lived in an atmosphere of love and charity, of bearing and forbearing, of thankfulness for mercies given, and a sense of responsibility for them and for life itself. It is a fine ether, impalpable but real, in which alone society, or the family, as well as the individual can prosper. In the world of commerce we are often told that it is the principle of universal trust, the just conviction that, on the whole, men will be faithful and true to their promises and engagements, on which the whole commerce of the world is based ; that if we could not assume it, or if it began to be untrustworthy, chaos would come again. And even so, is it not true that there is an unwritten law of thankfulness, a recognition of duties and not only of rights, a law of charity, and of the need of bearing and forbearing, a whole catalogue of duties which we owe almost wholly to Christianity, and which must seem no longer binding if Christianity lost its sanctions ; or at least, if still recognised as counsels of perfection, would remain under glass cases, so to speak, to be looked at and admired, but never touched and never used ? But the glory and the blessedness of the Christian religion is that these things are not superlative and exceptional virtues,

reserved for extraordinary men and women to display, but are constantly seen at work, in the homes of the poorest and the humblest, the least learned or important of the world ; that where the Spirit of Christ is sought for and entertained, it takes shape in these divinest and most beautiful of fruits—fruits which the world, that thinks it has outgrown Christ, is every day seeking to get rid of and to sneer away ; standing only on its legal rights, and its unquestioned privilege of doing everything it likes and nothing that it dislikes !

It bears opportunely upon what we are saying, that just before the final greetings and messages of this epistle, St. Paul has been enlarging on this special duty of the Christian to let his faith soften and sweeten and make generous all those relations of life which are so trying if either party to them insists upon having everything and giving nothing. “ Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things : for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers ; but in singleness of

heart, fearing God : and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men ; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance : for ye serve the Lord Christ." It is deeply interesting and pathetic to find, at this very outset of Christianity, the teacher pointing out this marvellous function and use of that religion to make these relationships healthful and beautiful, which, if they are grounded simply on contract, where each party wants everything for himself, must become false and unsound, and the source of all wretchedness : the relation of husband and wife, of father and child, of master and servant—just those relationships which in our time are the subject of ever newly invented dislocations and rebellions, struggles and resentments, bitterness and heart-burnings. We need such reminders as this when we indulge the vain dream that the health and loveliness of life can subsist without the recognition of a sovereign Lord and Master, whom all parties to contracts, all those united by relationships, whether of kin or otherwise, must needs obey, and on whose name and nature all the varied ties that unite men must be based. Mutual consideration, reverence, pity, and love—where these things are not, society cannot but be imperfect, jarring, and insecure. And it is just

these things that there is no guarantee of, when the Spirit of Christ is not allowed free access and free play. It is very wonderful how the Apostle deals with that relation of master and servant, not in his day a contract voluntary on both sides, which either can terminate at a given notice ; for in his day the servant was a slave, and in the eye of Greek and Roman law a chattel without rights. St. Paul accepted the facts he saw around him ; he could not alter them, though they were to be altered ; and the religion he first introduced to the Gentile world was, if not giving to slavery its death-blow on the moment, yet to sound its death-knell. From that day slavery was doomed. But in the very words with which he deals with it, he enunciates the mighty truth, mighty and impartial, with no respect of persons, for master and slave, that they both had a "master in heaven." And it is this, after all, that is at the root of all human relations, and should determine their right exercise. "In the fear of God," says St. Paul in this passage. He does not conceal from us, what is so persistently ignored in many a roseate religion of to-day which is offered as the substitute for an old-fashioned religion, that fear is at the root of love ; that where there is no fear, love is impossible ; that love, when perfect, puts fear out of



sight and thought, but that it must spring from the recollection that we have responsibilities to a Master, and that He will and can enforce our service and avenge our unfaithfulness. All the duties of home, all the sweet courtesies and charities of social life, all the difference in kindness and forbearance that makes those relations either Heaven or Hell ;—all these things depend on this recognition. It is of no use trusting to a feeble good-nature, a “religion of love” so-called, in which any real dependence on God is wholly left out of sight : love without fear is a feeble, fibreless thing, that can stand no test of trial or temptation. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” though its perfect end and fruit will be the “loving, with a pure heart, fervently.”

## XXI

### THE FAITH OF THE SAINTS

“ And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the Prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”—HEBREWS xi. 32-34.

JUST a month ago,<sup>1</sup> after the death of Lord Tennyson, from many pulpits in London and throughout England, the preacher bore glad and thankful testimony to the influence of the great poet and teacher who had passed away. It was no time or place for criticism, for estimating the rank which posterity would assign to him in the hierarchy of poets: but a great poet is always something more than a great poet; and it was for this “something more”—for his moral and spiritual impress upon his age—that we felt it not out of place to thank God

<sup>1</sup> Preached 6th November 1892.

in His own house of prayer. There was, as might have been expected, great unanimity on this point ; and in the general harmony I observed but one jarring note of discord. Some one wrote to the *Times* to the effect that this celebrating in the pulpit of the merits and glories of mere men was very indecorous, and a sad abuse of the function of the preacher, which was to glorify the Creator, and not the creature. The writer implied that when he attended church he expected his edification to come to him through quite other channels. The mysteries of the faith ; perhaps questions of moral casuistry, or that which makes one view orthodox, and another unorthodox ;—through such topics he felt that divine help and comfort were ordained to come, and not through the examples or teaching, however estimable, of fallible men.

And it seems strange, after a few moments' reflection, how little the Bible itself, in the form in which it has been given to us, seems to support this writer's view. God's revelation is framed from end to end in the example and the lives of men—their characters and their careers. Patriarchs, judges, kings, poets, prophets pass before us in order. They are entrusted with messages from God, with successive revelations of His nature and will ; but if we

had not their biographies — frankly, freely told, nothing extenuated, and nothing set down in malice — to illustrate and commend those messages and revelations, how poor we should be, how incalculable our loss ! Nay, we cannot conceive how the Bible could have been the Bible were it not written in the lives of men, with all their triumphs and disasters, all their strength and weakness. Every heavenly grace, such as Love, is revealed to us in the persons of those who love ; every theological mystery, such as Faith, is illustrated in the lives of those who had it. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews finds no more sure and satisfactory means of explaining what Faith is than in enumerating the men of old time, who owed to it the secret of their power. “By faith,” Abel ; “by faith,” Enoch ; “by faith,” Noah, won this or that victory over themselves or over the world. And instead of apologising for filling his pages with the praise of men, he only regrets that he has not space for more. “Time would fail me” to tell of Gideon, of Barak, and Samson, of David, and Samuel, and the Prophets. He implies that even these are but samples—samples of all those (“of whom the world was not worthy”) who in a generation absorbed in its private interests and lusts, breathing the low atmosphere of an earthly life, were

separate from the world in this, that they were fighting for an Ideal, driven on by a passionate faith in the God of Israel. Through Faith they were subduing kingdoms, and "out of weakness were made strong."

This passage, as we all remember, is from one of the lessons for the Festival of All Saints, just now passed ; and very precious it is in that connection, as helping us to keep our conception of the saintly function large and catholic, and as protecting us against the subtle temptation to identify the saintly ideal with any one type, congenial to ourselves, or perhaps our party. It is very salutary to be forced to recognise persons, the most various in character and temperament, as well as in powers and opportunities, as saints—saints, with all their failings and blemishes ; saints, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews classes them, by virtue of the aim they set before them, the steadfastness with which they pursued it, the utter self-abnegation by which they met suffering and death for its sake. It forces us to recognise that God's kingdom in this world has been, in all times, advanced by men in whom many of those ways and manners we have come to call specially "saintly" were conspicuously absent. The writer of the Epistle before us chooses his specimens

from what appears to us the rudest, roughest, most lawless period of Jewish history ; when the manners of men, however ardent they were to defend the cause of the true God, could not have had that repose which stamps the caste of the modern saint—of the type we most naturally call saintly—the meditative, the calm, the devotional. When we study the lives of a Jephthah, a Samson, a Gideon, with all their strange, grotesque, and even forbidding incidents, and read that these men were the saints of whom the world was not worthy, the idea of an orderly, meek, resigned “religious” life is, from the nature of the case, far enough off.

Certain technical associations have gathered about the phrase the “religious life,” which ill suit with the character and career of a Samson. Yet his critic, in our text, includes him as living such a life, merely because he worked and suffered to keep alive the idea and the authority of a true God—a God of purity and righteousness, when the allurements of idolatry were all around drawing men away with a fearful destructiveness. The career of a Gideon impresses us, indeed, as that of a fearless soldier, possessed by an enthusiasm for God. He comes in truth nearer home to our sympathies, for we have known such soldier-saints

in many an age nearer to our own. But the real work he did—the real work that all these men did—is told us more clearly by something that happened after his death, than by all that we read of his personal actions. His biographer in the Book of Judges tells us this most significant fact: “And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their god.” This is what the men called “saints” do for their own generation, and for all generations, unless they utterly pass out of men’s memories and records. They help, with all their varied gifts, talents, opportunities, to keep alive the claims of the true Lord on men’s spirits, against the idolatries of the Canaan in which they live. This is the bond which unites and harmonises all these various personalities; which makes kin the centuries before Christ and the centuries after: this it is which stamps and defines the one quality of the Saint: and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls it “Faith.”

He calls it “Faith,” and his clear object is to show its identity with the power, bearing the same name, which Jesus Christ had brought with Him as His greatest gift to men: “This is the victory

which overcometh the world, even your faith." Faith, the one essential bond between saint and saint. And yet, this word of words, when divorced from human history and the triumphs it has won, how easily it dwindles into a theological abstraction—the topic of a thousand writers, the source and fount of a thousand controversies. How often has the word, separated from life and action, been

Profaned by every charlatan,  
And soiled by all ignoble use.

And hence the inestimable boon of such a scripture as this, where the unknown but learned and devout writer goes back a thousand years and more in his nation's history to find there the true essence and virtue of faith, and to commend it to men already entangling in the controversies of metaphysics. Did he already notice that Faith—the central word (on man's side) in Old and New Testaments, and the connecting-link between them—was about to acquire new meanings, and pass from out men's lives into their formulæ—a thing to talk about, to study, and to analyse? Did he perceive that men might come to regard Faith as something to live for, instead of something to live by; to cherish Faith as itself "an article of faith"; to believe in it (the instrument), in place of relying upon God? Was it



for this that he pointed back to a state of society even then so remote and so different, to a state of society when theology and morals were as yet all but comprised in the simple alternative, "If the Lord be God, follow Him; if Baal, follow Him"? Whatever the writer's motive, this course he took. He interpreted and commended the "Faith" which Christ taught, by the faith of those ancient times—to show that the two were identical, and given to men for an identical purpose. New and fuller revelations of God had indeed come to men; Faith was furnished with a wider, a deeper outlook—but its mission was the same always—to enable men to live above the world, and to win the world to follow them.

"The time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, of Samson, and of Jephthah." It is impossible to mistake the significant language in which this writer accentuates over and over again the one quality which knits together all these discordant elements into one bond of saintly work, almost as if he foresaw the narrowing tendency of diverging opinions to limit the saintly ideal. He even begins by defining Faith in terms independent of theologies, ancient or modern, and never to be affected by any changes of human knowledge or opinion. He

makes that definition as wide, as all-embracing as it can be. "Faith" (I quote from our Revised Version) "is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen."

Nothing can be simpler, more beyond all cavilling. It is the acting upon a conviction of things we do not see as if we did see them, and the proving the truth of them by tests more certain than eyesight. And immediately after, he adds another fragment of description which shall still further serve to keep true Faith distinct from all counterfeits. "He that cometh to God must believe that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Now the first of these utterances, if we really accept it, should keep our conception of the saint large; if, that is to say, the saint is the man or woman who keeps his or her faith unshaken in the midst of a faithless world. I began by saying that our natural bias is to attach to certain forms and expressions of holiness the name of saintly. And the scripture for All Saints' Day most wisely brings together, side by side, the most opposite, or rather all the complementary aspects, of the saintly life. While in the lesson we are reminded of Gideon, Samson, and Barak; in the gospel for the day we are referred, by the

enumeration of our Lord's beatitudes, to the gentler, more passive graces, of the saint. "Blessed are the meek; blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." Here is the saintly type after our own heart: we do with all our heart and soul recognise in such as these the reflection of the holiness and purity of God. It is only when we turn in thought from these to the saints who seem so little like them, in the Book of Judges, that we need the larger definition of the saint, as one who has Faith while the world has none, to keep us from confusion and disillusion. We know, indeed, no more of a man like Samson than the stirring record of his outward fortunes; but if the saint be the meek, the student of holiness, the hungerer and thirster after righteousness, who shall reconcile the two conceptions? No one—nothing—save the clue which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives us—Faith: the one touch of "grace" that makes all God's servants "kin." Not alone by Faith do men subdue kingdoms; by Faith also they subdue themselves: not only by Faith do they overcome their enemies; by Faith also they overcome the world. In fighting for others' salvation, or their own, they are alike

doing the saints' office, and are true to the work given them to do, which is different for every man. And all alike must suffer. Suffering is the badge of all their tribe. Faith the starting-point, suffering the inevitable condition ; these are the same for all, whether it be a Gideon fighting for a God of Israel against Baalim, or the mourner for his own sin and weakness, weeping in loneliness through the midnight hours. Let neither of these deny to his fellow the name of saint or the ministry of saintliness. Each has his work to do—each does it imperfectly, and through failures, disappointments, and humiliations. The saint is not a faultless creature, either in himself or in his methods. But he believes something which the world does not believe, and lives above the world, and of him the world is not worthy.

My brethren, let us strive to keep our conception of the saint wide and catholic. Let us love to trace the saintly function, not chiefly among those who share our methods and our views, but among those farthest removed from such. For in the presence of that word "Faith," all walls of party should fall to the ground. There are those who will resent this advice, and take alarm lest if we widen the area of saintliness we should be in danger of

lowering its standard. I believe the very opposite of this to be the truth. Keeping firmly hold of "Faith" as the one essential test of the saint's work, we shall be best able to distinguish the true Faith from the spurious, the true saint from the sham. Wherever Faith is seen in action, there is a saint of God at work. Wherever in lonely village, in squalid court, the sorely-tempted man is labouring for God's sake to preserve his honesty; wherever the friendless and starving woman is struggling to be pure, because the vision of the Holy One is ever before her, there is the saint. It is only when Faith is a watchword and a sentiment, but nothing more, that, however sweet and sentimental the environment, the saintliness has lost its savour, and is useless to the world. It has no regenerative, no contagious virtue. That is not the Faith that kindles other faith, and hands on the torch along the march of men.

Infinitely various, then, are the missions and functions of Faith, and we cannot afford to disparage any, or refuse them recognition. Wherever God has given us great examples, or profound teachers, or inspiriting voices, conveying to us Faith, awakening it in us, commending it to us, making it lovely and attractive, pouring streams of life and strength

down from the mountain-tops on us, breathing the too easy, perhaps the enervating and malarious atmosphere of the valley below, there is the saintly office at work, even though the voice be but a voice, and we know little enough of the personality of the prophet who utters it. Outside the special ministry of the Christian priesthood is the vaster ministry of man's influence upon man. Bad, piteous, shameful, as is one side of that influence, let us all the more never forget that there is another side—blessed, life-giving, beneficent. "On God and godlike men we build our trust"; and whoever witnesses for God in an atheistic age, for Faith in a material age, for all that is lovely and of good report, when "high living and low thinking" have fullest sway, we submit is among those for whom it is right, not wrong—reverent, not irreverent—for us to thank God, even in the pulpits of a Christian Church. My brethren, it is a "far cry" from the chieftains and warriors of the age of the Judges to a poet and prophet of the Victorian era; and yet, so far as the latest teacher, moved by faith in the Highest, helps to keep that faith from dying out in the world, he is one of the same beneficent company to whom the world in all ages has been debtor. Though we can picture to ourselves so

imperfectly the Judges of old—though their actions and methods seem so incongruous to a later day—we know (and it is enough) that this they achieved. By Faith they lived, for Faith they toiled, and rather than abjure that Faith, when the need came, they died. We argue often in this our day as to how history is made — whether by the orderly development of law, or by the influence of great men appearing, we know not why or how. In that far-off time the historian believes in the latter. The story of each generation he connects with its leading witness and champion for God. The pulse of the national faith beats fast or slow according as the leader's influence is felt or unfelt; and when a Gideon dies, we find that the unstable people wander back to the gods of the heathen with their more attractive cultus and their low morale.

We waive such general speculations to-day: we waive also such questions as where technically inspiration begins and ends; who are, or who are not, theologically speaking, God's prophets and interpreters. But at least we may not shirk our responsibility for every good and perfect gift, because every such an one comes down from Heaven. We are bound to use and to profit by, and to thank God for, all human forces working

among us for our good. One such potent spiritual force was the great poet just passed away—the most potent, I believe, in this century's literature, next to that of Wordsworth. Time would fail, indeed, to sum up, however briefly, the great thoughts, the noble reasonings, the encouragements, the consolations that have through Tennyson's verse found their way to many a heart and spirit that, if the truth were known, had held out long against kindred pleadings, conveyed in the perhaps sterile language of school-room divinity. In the life of many a man, as I have reason to believe, what he has first learned from the poet has led him to understand better the message of the prophet and the priest. No wonder—for poetry is the interpreter of life. Time, again, would fail to illustrate this by instance or quotation; but will not many among my hearers confirm this that I say—that the peculiar temptations of an age of high culture have been to many a man first brought home to him there? Have they not learned from the "Vision of Sin" that cynicism is not a sign of strength, but of weakness—of superiority to the common herd, but inferiority; because the cynic and the pessimist is the corruption of the worldling and the voluptuary—"the crime of sense avenged by time." And



who can tell how far that beneficent movement, one of the most hopeful of our time, for diffusing the high and ennobling pleasures of art and science and literature among the less fortunate of the world, that has produced our Toynbee Hall, our Oxford Houses, our Kyrle Societies, and a hundred more, has not been due to the human conscience, smitten by that marvellous picture of the "sinful soul, possessed of many gifts," which at first loved all good things, but only "for their beauty," and so loving, kept them in selfish isolation for itself, until, struck down, like Herod on the judgment-seat, by remorse, it confessed that such cultivation, such enjoyment, has in it the seeds of death because of its isolation, because it has "shut Love out."

Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are  
 So lightly, beautifully built :  
 Perchance I may return with others there  
 When I have purged my guilt.

It is our great men who have the gift of Faith who help us to have it and to live above the world. Let us cherish their memory, and speak of them and honour them. And not the least precious among these are our poets ; for when they pass away, their power remains, and even widens, and is strengthened. "Their place is changed—they are

the same." They do not "die to us, although they die." Yet we dare not worship them, or make a religion out of them; for the worship of any God short of the highest means degradation and corruption. "We needs must love the highest when we see it." They are not the Light—they but reflect the light. "Jesus Christ is to me," said one day the departed poet, "as is the sun to yonder flower." So must it be to us; for power comes from the source, not from the colour, beauty, charm of the reflection.

## XXII

### WICLIF

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”—ACTS ii. 40.

THE few weeks past and to come are full of interesting anniversaries and commemorations. We are here to-day on one of those which touch each individual of us most nearly, the first Sunday in a New Year.<sup>1</sup> Only the other day we thought it not inappropriate to speak of a wise and good man who lived so long in the shelter or companionship of these courts. A few weeks hence we shall be celebrating the seven hundredth anniversary of the consecration of this church in which we worship. And no earnest or thoughtful person, who feels that it is part of the divine nature in man to “look before and after”—to be grateful for the rich inheritance of the past, and the precious lessons of experience, as well as to press onward and cherish

<sup>1</sup> Preached 4th January 1885.

the hope that shall not "make ashamed"—will demur to the time that is spent in taking note of such coincidence in time and place. We can never afford to forget the good men that have lived and worked in the world, and helped us to be wiser and better.

And there is yet one more such day in the calendar which we may have remembered in the past week, though in a season of much social festivity our teachers in the Daily Press had not afforded any space to notice it. On the 31st of December 1384 died the great Reformer, John Wiclif, at his parish rectory of Lutterworth. I fear that the general conception of Wiclif is somewhat dim and confused. We do not know him as a personality as we know many others as far removed from us in time. We do not know him in face and figure, and in play of mind and imagination, as we know his great successor, his spiritual descendant, Martin Luther, born just a hundred years after Wiclif died. We do not know him as we know his actual contemporary, Geoffrey Chaucer. His writings, moreover, are mainly controversial, and are written, of course, in an antiquated English, which though entirely comprehensible, yet repels the ordinary reader. And, finally, the chain of his influence on the Reformation of religion in England was by circumstances broken; and only

the student of history and theology can truly estimate how, though the adherents of Wiclif as a leader perished and left no descendants soon after his death, the chain never was broken, but only was concealed; that it was held by and passed through the hands of Huss and Jerome, to Luther and Calvin, and returned again to the England of three generations later. Lastly, Wiclif (again like Luther) was not destined to be, in the vulgar sense of the term, a martyr. He did not witness to his beliefs by the supreme testimony of his life. It was, indeed, not his fault that he did not so end his days. It was surely not owing to any defect of courage or plain-speaking that he escaped this fate; but mainly that he was identified with a national as well as a theological attitude towards the Supremacy of Rome, and was thus protected by the Government of his own country. Still, this may account, in its measure and degree, for the name of Wiclif not being so closely associated in the affections of Englishmen as some others with those great reforms of doctrine which he first declared the necessity of, and with that yet greater inheritance bequeathed to us of "Righteousness as the test of doctrine," which was the key-note, and the root-motive, of all his life and teaching.

The word "Protestant," I need hardly remind

you, was not invented till many a year after Wiclif's death ; nor, when it was first introduced, had it the meaning we commonly associate with it, of one who "protests against" theological error or moral corruption. Yet taking it for the moment in the sense of "one who protests," it is singularly characteristic of Wiclif's whole teaching. His first eminence was achieved as a scholar. He was Fellow, and afterwards Master, of the now great College of Balliol. He was a lecturer on the Scriptures, and his devotion to this theme, and the paramount value he ascribed to the Bible as the one only guide of faith and morals, acquired for him the title, given by analogy with those bestowed on the other great Masters of Theology in the Middle Ages, of the *Evangelical* Doctor. He translated the Bible into English ; an achievement in itself of the highest consequence in the direction of the English mind of the future. For though criticised, condemned, and maligned by the Clerical Powers ; though multiplied by hand slowly and laboriously, and of enormous cost ; its spread, in detached portions, all over the country ; and its thoughts and words, its warnings and its comforts, became the property of all classes down to the very poorest and humblest. Wiclif himself took the initiative in judging afresh every practice and

institution of the Church by the rule and guide of Scripture. There was no doctrine or practice that we recall Latimer or Ridley having protested against, that Wiclif had not anticipated them in. The central doctrine of the Church, Transubstantiation, he boldly traversed ; and the central theory of Moral Perfection, in the conventual life, he as boldly denied. The immoral lives of the monks and the mendicants ; the covetousness of the religious Orders generally ; the divorce of religion from morals ; the "mechanical" religion of pilgrimages and penances ;—against all these things Wiclif protested with absolute explicitness of speech and carelessness of personal consequences. And yet he lived nearly threescore and ten years, and died at length struck down by paralysis while hearing Mass in his own church at Lutterworth. It was only some years later that the zeal of his enemies wrought their impotent malice on his mouldering remains, and scattered his bones to the chance mercies of a flowing stream.

Wiclif's life seems one of controversy and of denunciation, yet it would be a grievous mistake to connect his memory exclusively with these. He was a student and scholar, and a parish priest. He most assuredly did not share the common delusion of controversial writers and speakers, that

the moral and spiritual advance of mankind can be furthered by the merely negative attitude of a denier of existing errors, and a protester against current scandals. We have known in our own time orators who have made their living and their reputation by denouncing the errors of the Church of Rome, whose books have sold by the hundred thousand; who could kindle anywhere and everywhere that kind of enthusiasm which, like brushwood, is so easily kindled and so soon extinguished; which leads, if to anything permanent, only to a more rooted dislike and contempt for others, and to a more serene confidence in one's own superior goodness and security of heaven. This, I need not say, does not represent Wiclif's achievement for us. He went on to plant deep, and to spread widely, the truths and the moral wisdom that were to take the place of what he denounced. He gave us all the inestimable boon of an English Bible. The other gift was to his generation, I would have said, were it not that every really vital blessing accorded to one's own age carries with it its immortal virtues down all the ages that follow. Wiclif sent forth among men his order of *poor priests*: of men who should carry his teaching and spread his ideal through the towns and villages of England—simple in their lives, asking no alms or sub-



scriptions, hampered by no machinery, with no message other than the words of Christ and His Twelve. A memorable portrait of one such has come down to us, from the hand of one of the greatest of portrait painters among our poets, in the "poorè Parson of a town" of Wiclif's contemporary, Chaucer—drawn, it is absolutely certain, from the ideal which Wiclif fixed. The ideal Shepherd of men, who was himself poor, but rich "in thought and work"; learned, and yet content to teach the elements of godliness to the simplest; benign and diligent, "and in adversity full pacient," giving to his sheep this "noble ensample"—

That first he wrought and afterward he taught;  
And in his teaching díscreet and benigne;  
To drawen folk to heven by fairnesse,  
By good ensample, was his bisynesse.  
For Christés lore, and his apostles twelve,  
He taughte, but first he followed it himselve.

This was the Wiclif Ideal, happily thus preserved for us by one who had the poet's sympathetic eye for the true helper of mankind. This we owe to the great Protestant,—the Morning Star of the Reformation, as he is most justly called. It is more than a compensation for our having no picture of the man himself; no table-talk, as with Martin Luther, to

reflect every side of a many-coloured mind. Wiclif lives for us in the rights he first claimed for us, which, though delayed, were reasserted and reconquered two centuries later ; and in the practical and peremptory assertion of the great truth, that any religion is corrupt which does not make for practical righteousness ; which does not impose on men as the first necessity that they shall be upright, pure, and self-denying.

“ And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” There is much in the account of the first days of the infant church of Christ that we have been reading this afternoon that recalls the simplicity and beauty of what I have called the Wiclif Ideal. Save and except for the command to be baptized, St. Peter’s address to the crowd was no other than that of Wiclif’s poor priests : “ Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Those who were attracted by the music of this message, and felt a new peace sinking deep into their souls, whether those who were, in Peter’s day, soon to bear the name of Christians, or who, in Wiclif’s day, were to receive the contemptuous name of

Lollard, are recalled to us in the words that follow, about those who "gladly received the word," who "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." There is something singularly pathetic in the picture that follows, of the peace and joy of a multitude, happy in their new faith and hope ; happy in fellowship with one another, and in the innocent hospitalities of family and friendship ; happy in the circumstance that those who noted their behaviour from outside saw in it only subject for admiration and kindly feeling. Persecution was to come, as the Lord had forewarned them, but not yet. Divisions on doctrine and practice must arise, and set house against house, brother against brother, but as yet the new-found joy was too all-absorbing. Sin was to appear, alas ! to defile the new communion ; but as yet Ananias and Sapphira had not brought shame and scandal upon the Christian profession. " Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily" *not* (according to the unfortunate mistranslation in the Authorised Version) " such as should be

saved," but (as our Revised Version authoritatively informs us) "those that were being saved"; those, that is to say, who had accepted the baptism and the faith of Christ, and who had turned their faces towards the goal which He had set before them.

There is a touching concurrence here with the thoughts that naturally belong to a New Year. For it is the picture of a young, new church, "ere sin could blight or sorrow fade," pure as new-fallen snow, before the impurities of the world and man's handling had sullied its whiteness. It represents the new church of Wiclif's dreams, which he did not live to see realised. On the last day of 1384 "God's finger touched him and he slept." He had lived long enough to be aware of the rocks upon which his more impetuous adherents were likely to make shipwreck of the cause. One more specially curious coincidence is to be noticed between a part of the narrative before us and the dream of social equality which led some of Wiclif's followers astray: "All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." This is the first and the solitary mention in the New Testament of a

community of goods. "They had all things common." There may be those in all times who eagerly seize upon the words as importing that private property was thenceforth abolished as an unchristian thing. There is no trace of such teaching being meant. Such a formation of a common fund for the relief of the sick and needy, as was accomplished, was clearly a voluntary act, for it was especially attributed by St. Peter to Ananias that his sin was the greater, inasmuch as the act out of which it rose was gratuitous. "There was no need for you to have done this," the Apostle urged, "for the property you sold was in your own power, and you need not have sold it." Moreover, it very soon appears from the pages of the Acts of the Apostles that various disciples possessed their own houses and other properties; and this is inconsistent with the interpretation of this passage as an abnegation of the first condition and necessity of civilised life,—possessions, and responsibility for their use. In the first days of the early Church, when doctrine and practice were at their simplest and purest, a common fund was unquestionably established, from which those who could not work or were disabled by sickness were assisted. "As every man had need" are the significant words of

the passage, and we are reminded of the season of New Year's tide, when kindness and liberality and the wants and cares of the poor are in all good men's thoughts. But there is no word of encouragement for those who would reduce men again to savagery, by neutralising the vast differences of moral quality and intellectual power among men ; who would attempt to set at nought the eternal law of God that integrity and industry and self-denial mean success, and that intemperance and sloth and dishonesty mean failure. But the curious coincidence that I would note is, that the true Christian socialism which is here sketched out, and which Wiclif himself doubtless preached, was travestied by the more violent of his followers into a socialism of a political kind ; and this did more than anything else to bring discredit upon the name of Lollard, and to hasten its end as a separate and distinct agency. After Wiclif's death, Lollardy became more and more a name for sedition and anarchy. His noblest follower, John Oldcastle, died a martyr. Foreign wars at first, and then domestic war for fifty years afterwards, drove out the more serious thoughts and words of Wiclif and his missionaries. But they flowed on, like some English streams, underground : the Bible, in Wiclif's

version, was never extirpated, but lay like a leaven silently leavening the lump ; and Wiclif's work was never lost.

That the influence of this great Reformer was never dead is shown by the fact that thirty years after his death the Council of Constance solemnly condemned his teaching and cursed his memory ; and that some years later still, fanatical hands sought to give practical effect to the curse, and confer honour on the Church of Christ, by disinterring Wiclif's ashes and casting them into the little brook, the Swift, which flowed hard by. And so, in the often-quoted words of Fuller, " This brook has conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean ; and thus the ashes of Wiclif are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over."

This saying of Fuller's, about Wiclif's doctrine being dispersed all the world over, may be extended to his influence and his memory, and is, indeed, the true reason and justification for the observance of all anniversaries such as this. We cannot afford to forget the great and good men who have lived among us, I was going to add, even if their work has perished. But the work of the great and good

never perishes. We all of us need the constant sympathy and stimulus that is supplied by the thought of these. We need to bear in mind that vast communion of saints that is afforded by the presence of the good of all times, just because "the communion of saints" may be so imperfectly represented in the closer, nearer world that we mix in. We are so near to this lesser circle, that we see, only too clearly, its defects and corruptions, its imperfect realisation; and the discords of opinion and temper that make "jangling" out of the sweet music of the bells. The contemplation of family unhappiness, and social antipathies, and the scandals of party bitterness and religious inconsistencies,—all this may make us disposed to scout the idea of the communion of saints as a mockery and a delusion. Then, too, the purity of new institutions and new reforms does not last. The ideal of the new Church, related by St. Luke—how far we seem from it in practice! the ideal Church of Wiclif, how far it may be, in fact, from the shape it took in the Reformer's mind! The kindness and charity of the Christmas feast may already be passing into the distance, and its splendour fading into the light of common day. The good resolutions, the wise purposes, the chastened feeling, that belong to the opening of a



New Year, may even to-day have given place to thoughts and schemes less worthy of spiritual beings. For all these reasons, how good must it not be that we should be fortified, not on this day and on that, but at all moments of our lives, by the invisible companionship of those who werê good and brave, and had firm faith in God's Law being the only prosperity for the world ; and who lived and worked for that end, careless of the lives they carried in their hand. Anniversaries and commemorations are of little use save as they stimulate memories which should be always with us. Happy they who can refresh their strength at these springs, in their own homes and among their nearest friends. Happy those who can look daily upon characters that are sweet and unworldly, and are themselves the very earnest and pledge of life eternal. Happier still they who exercise this ministry towards others. "Every life," it has been justly said, "is a profession of faith, and exercises a silent but inevitable propaganda ; it tends to transform, so far as its influence extends, all men to its image. All of us have charge of souls . . . such is the vast importance of example." Let us carry away this lesson for the New Year, and as a result of dwelling upon the great spiritual teachers of a

far off age, if we are grateful for their example and encouragement, let us learn to give back unto the world the good we have received. In this, as in all things, "Freely ye have received, freely give." In this, among other ways, we shall be more than conquerors—we shall have comfort and strength and hope that the world knows not of. In the midst of an "untoward generation" we shall live as children of the light.

## XXIII

### THE HONOUR THAT COMETH FROM GOD ONLY

“How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?”—JOHN v. 44.

THE words are a part of that impassioned apology and justification for His action in the matter of the healing a sick man on the Sabbath day, that Jesus delivered to the Pharisees and other religious leaders of the Jews. The incident of the miracle at the Pool of Bethesda, and the attack upon Jesus that followed, and His reply to the attack, occupy the whole of this chapter of St. John's Gospel. “The man departed,” we read, “and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day.” This was the original ground of offence. But a second and more serious ground was at once to present itself. For Jesus opened His

reply to His accusers with the words, startling and very novel in their ears, we must admit, "My Father worketh hitherto, and *I* work." We cannot wonder that this seemed a fearful aggravation of the original blasphemy—that "the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." Into the Saviour's defence which follows, we cannot to-day enter in detail. He defended the assertion of His unity with the Father, as He always did, by the offer of arguments addressed to the spiritual faculty in his hearers. It was the identity of will—of nature—with His Father, He wished them to recognise and honour. Not the exalting of Himself into a place of equality with God, but the subordinating Himself to the Father's will: this Jesus here, as always, sets forth as the justification of a claim so marvellous, so boundless. It is the paradox of the Incarnation, that the equality of the Son with the Father is grounded upon the subordination of the Son to the Father. "I can of mine own self do nothing." This was the answer of Jesus to the Jewish Churchman who imagined that because the new Teacher claimed to be equal with God, He was therefore claiming a boundless independence. Who can

wonder indeed that this should have been so? If we knew nothing else about a prophet who went about working miracles, and making converts, and telling men that he was their God, we should naturally and reasonably infer that in this last boastful assertion he was claiming to have no superior: to be irresponsible to any authority in heaven and earth except to his own will and pleasure. To declare oneself God is indeed to shock and alarm the spiritual sense of the best men in the world, not the worst only. But Jesus accompanies such declaration always with the explanation—may we not call it—that gives it its one meaning and comfort. His place is still the second, not the first. “I can of mine own self do nothing.” “My judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”

To this evidence in Himself, the entire conformity to His Father's will, and the perfect exhibition of the Father's character, He appeals. But even this evidence, if it is to convince men, is not sufficient. Of what avail is it to manifest before men the perfect image of the God of holiness, if the eye to which it is presented is not single? Jesus was daily exhibiting the character of God before the Pharisee, but then the Pharisee was preoccupied

with an idea of God quite different. How should he recognise in Jesus a likeness that had no counterpart in his own mind? This was the problem — the awful, the terrible problem. Jesus had to create in the hearts of men the very sense by which Himself was to be judged. Some, we know, allowed His words, His acts, His character, to recreate in their consciences the perfect type of Deity. The woman who was a sinner was one of those. She had learned from the holiness and mercy of Jesus, the holiness and mercy of God; and though no theological idea had been formulated in the process, she had learned that God had stooped to her; and she had gone away reconciled and saved. The companion figure of the Pharisee had learned nothing of the kind. His own old, perverted image of Deity retained its hold upon him still. He had learned nothing new, and gone his way unchanged. So here; the position is the same always. “Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.” “I receive not honour from men.” Jesus anticipates the retort that in claiming to be able to give men life, He is asking men to fall down and worship *Him*. “It is not so,” He says. “I ask no honour, and I receive none, from men. I am made of other mould than those who seek first the good opinion of their

fellows. I believe in God so utterly, just because the honour I seek is from Him only." And then follows the inevitable contrast between this belief of His and the real unbelief of the Pharisee He is addressing. "*You*, how can *you* believe? How should you believe—you who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"

The form of this rebuke is so impressive because, as so often in Christ's logic, causes and consequences seem to have changed places. We, in our cautious and orderly way, regard conduct as following from the firmness of our faith in God. If we only believe in God—we know, and truly argue—we shall then seek praise from Him, and not from men. But Christ here presents another view of the subject, and submits to us how our practice in this respect reacts upon our power of believing. He charges the Pharisees with having disqualified themselves for judging of His claims to represent God to them. These men were framing their whole behaviour and conduct, religious and other, upon a system which blinded their eyes to the Truth even when it stood before them for their recognition. Habitually to seek the good opinion of men, and all the rewards and pleasures and comforts of that sort of popularity

which follow in its train,—this is the certain way to blind men's eyes to the truth: to make falsehoods appear truths, and truths falsehoods. This is the great fact proclaimed in the words of our text, and we can hardly find any other fact of our spiritual being more urgently demanding our attention.

Indeed, it is a fact so vast in its bearing upon us, when we come to entertain it, that it seems to cover the whole field of conduct. For what is there in our lives, from the cradle to the grave, that is not more or less influenced by our desire to stand well with our fellow-creatures? The desire to please men, and to obtain honour from them, has indeed two aspects. It may at the outset of our lives be one of the very noblest yearnings of the soul, and form one of the best and most fruitful disciplines in the making of that soul. The true education of a child, before the time when it has to walk independently of parent and teacher, and to choose for itself in life, is built up on the seeking honour from men. The child who seeks the praise of a just and loving parent is in truth being educated and prepared, in the best of all ways, for honouring and seeking the praise of a Father of Spirits, when the time is ripe for entering upon the higher stage of responsibility. Who of us has not been aware, in the instance of his



own moral growth, that the desire for the good opinion of the good has been at times a blessing, and even a safeguard in many an hour of doubt or temptation. But this is not even in semblance a contravention of the Saviour's teaching. For in the case of the child, the school-boy, the student, these hallowed influences, though incarnated in human shape, are really divine. Parent, schoolmaster, religious teacher, stand to us, for the moment, *in loco Dei*: they stand to the child or the disciple for the teaching and example of his God. For these men, of whom honour has been sought, are above and greater than their worshippers. It was the sin and the misery of the Jewish religionists that they sought honour "from one another"; that they were not anxious to obtain honour from those greater, better, wiser than themselves, but from those who rather looked up to *them*. It makes just all the difference, whether the honour we seek is from our betters or our inferiors. There is a hero-worship (even though that hero be a man, and compassed with inevitable infirmities) which, though it is a poor thing and full of dangers in comparison with the worship of God, yet has in it, as a great modern teacher never wearied of insisting, elements of profit and blessing for us. But the worship of those who are not heroes can never end in anything but

degradation. To care for the honour of those who are not worthy of honour, is the beginning of a deterioration, of which one mark—so Christ tells us in our text to-day—is the loss of faith in God, the loss of the power to appreciate His nature and His claim upon us. “How *can* we believe, if we seek honour from men, and not from God?”

But when the period of parent and teacher, governors and tutors, has passed away; when new responsibility and the necessity for independent judgment presents itself with every fresh day; when the pursuit of our profession, the claims of friendship and society, produce ever new problems for our solution, then begins the real trial of our allegiance. Shall we seek the praise of men, or the praise of God? Shall we play a game in life, or serve a Master? How many of us choose the former, as the course easier, pleasanter, and more conducive to success; serving, it might seem, two masters—ourselves and the public opinion among which we live: the only serving of two masters which has been ever found possible, and that only because the two are in fact one—and that is, our own immediate profit. Shall we seek honour from men, or from God? And the alternative may be expressed thus: Shall we believe in God, or drift into an inevitable scepticism?

It is one of the vast blessings of the divine literature we call the Bible, and one of those features of it that give it its unity, that the great teaching of its great teachers is illustrated throughout by the lives of the servants of God there portrayed to us. If we would test the eternal truth of this saying of Christ, we have only to take one by one the life-stories of the great men who constitute the Bible history; for the Bible history from end to end is a chain, whose gold links are the men who believed in God, obeyed Him, and worked out His great purposes in educating the world to know God better. The Bible history is one long comment on the truth before us in our text, that the men whose belief in God was most intense and most unquestioning, were they who sought unswervingly the "approbation," which is but another name for "honour," that cometh from God alone. As long as they worked for the purposes of a good and loving Father, this belief in Him waxed strong.

On this fourth Sunday in Lent we have had before us, in two lessons of singular beauty, utterances of two men separated by nearly two thousand years—men called by God to work as different as possible, each strong and effectual in that work, and leaving ineffaceably stamped upon that work each his own

impress. Is there, I confidently ask, in the whole range of history, sacred or profane, any series of incidents more touching, or any figure that moves and directs them more noble, than in that episode in the life of the Hebrew Joseph in Egypt we have just heard? It is, as I have said, a most pathetic coincidence, that after contemplating that figure, we pass to a truly companion figure, that of St. Paul making his apology to the Corinthians: pleading, with that simple frankness that marks the man who is absolutely sure of his own motives, the sufferings and sorrows he has undergone as the servant of other men; to help them, but never to gain honour or glory from them: never bidding for their compassion, never allowing them to lose courage by the example of his own despondency; preaching hope always, even when the horizon is darkest—"troubled on every side, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." It has become almost a proverb that this apostle, in his tact and delicacy, his consideration for others, his tenderness and courtesy, is one of the most perfect gentlemen in history; and it is by an opportune coincidence that we are reminded how the characteristics of the gentleman are confined to no one country or stage of civilisa-

tion when we hear the address of Joseph to the covetous and jealous brethren of his who had been glad to get him anyhow out of the way, and to bargain and lie in the doing of it. There is something that curiously recalls the peculiar delicacy and courtesy of the Apostle Paul in the pains he takes to spare the feelings of these unworthy brethren, and to help them as it were to forgive themselves, by pointing out how God had over-ruled this family schism to work out His own wise and loving purposes for the people at large. "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life." Here is the blending of perfect charity and of refined tact, that makes the manners, that in their turn "make the man." Here are seen the qualities which alone constitute the true gentility, in comparison with which the most perfect breeding transmitted through many generations of polite society is merely the thinnest veneer. The life lived simply in obedience to the voice of God and to the task committed to his hands has done this for Joseph. And it was the same unflinching trust in a Person, and fidelity to duty, that produced the same result in the greatest of the Christian apostles. Each man is the product at once of his faith in God and his sense of duty.

Each wins the honour of his fellows, but only because he never sought it. If either of them had yielded to the temptation to court the suffrages of men, he could not have continued what he was, could not have retained his power for a single day. Each stands, on the contrary, a witness and example for ever—one of these Bayard-saints of God, without fear of man, and therefore without reproach.

Even in an age when scepticism of other kinds is rife, we are still, thank God, not yet sceptical of the reality, and therefore the eternal virtue, of this type of character. A great man has passed away from us this week,<sup>1</sup> and is this day in all our thoughts, and it were affectation to ignore the fact. The sense of loss which is present in all our hearts, is not that of having lost one whose genius might yet have served his country in government or in debate. His work had long been practically over. The poignant sense of loss we all are feeling is due, I conceive, chiefly to the feeling that the special type of character, and the special virtue of such a type, grows rarer and rarer; and that in the present state of public life it seems so little likely to reappear, or to hold its own against the types that most conflict

<sup>1</sup> Preached on the Sunday after the death of John Bright (died 27th March 1889).

with it. If so, there is something in our sadness to awaken a still profounder sorrow. For the decay of the type is a more terrible loss to a nation than the passing away of any representative of the type, however beloved and honoured. In the fulness of age, a veteran has passed away; and it could not be otherwise. But the singular and most pathetic unanimity of judgment that this death has brought into the front this week, drowning for awhile, or rather hushing (let us thank God), the never-ceasing roar of party conflict, carries in it thoughts, in truth, "too deep for tears." The fact that it is universally hailed as a wonderful and memorable thing, that a statesman should have consistently passed unscathed through the fires of political trial; that neither office, nor popularity, nor wealth, nor even party should ever have deflected his conscience one hair's breadth, or for one moment, from its allegiance to Truth and the Will of his Maker, as he understood that will—this fact has surely something to make us sad. It is good, surely, to rejoice in such a spectacle; but it is a solemn thing that we should seem to point to it as a phenomenon. It seems to me not incongruous to-day, to couple the name of a beloved leader of men, John Bright, even with the names of those two statesmen and leaders of old

whom our Sunday services make so prominent. For if, as I have said, the secret of their faith and consequent power lay in their illustrating the great truth of our text, so was it the secret of the faith and the power of the statesman we have lost. He never sought honour from men, and he *did* seek the honour that cometh from God. He never concealed, though he never claimed special glory for it, the fact that Justice and Mercy and the Duty of man to man as set forth in the Bible, and notably in the Old Testament records of the earlier ages of mankind, were to his spiritual sense the only guide, but the necessary guide, for considering the most modern questions of state and legislation. He has been often compared with the Hebrew Prophets, and his indignation and bitter sarcasm had, at times when he was deeply moved, the ring of Isaiah or Jeremiah. But the scriptural parallel is not quite perfect. It was with such narratives as those of the patriarchal families we are reading on these Sundays in Lent, that he seemed most deeply imbued. As with all really strong men, tenderness was the habitual companion and support of his firmness and his capacity for deep anger and loathing in the presence of injustice or hypocrisy.

“Intense study of the Bible,” S. T. Coleridge



used to say, "would keep any one from being vulgar in point of style." And no doubt to that source was due in part the strength and purity of John Bright's English, the absence of anything approaching to fine writing, those qualities in him as an orator on which everybody is dwelling this week. His oratory, like his own motives, was beyond suspicion as to its sincerity. It was a remark of his own, I remember, that he had never been accustomed to consider eloquence as anything else than the "result of loving truth." And we can feel in the noblest of his own efforts as an orator, that it is just that profound love of truth, and belief in it, that made the transparency, the nobility, the majesty of his utterance. And in truth "by your words shall you be justified" has a much larger bearing than is at first apparent. There are few truer indexes, not only to mind but to character, than a man's public utterances. We may carry this away with all the other lessons of sad contrast that crowd upon us this week. But there are better lessons and more profitable contrasts than these. We are the richer, and should be the better, for this new proof that what makes a man a true leader of his fellows is that he has made himself the servant of his fellows; that the shepherd is one who cares for the sheep, and not for his own prominence,

still less his own promotion ; that though in the passing strife and bitterness of greatly debated changes in the body politic, a man may be condemned and hated, he may yet be all the while, for those who hated him, a well of inspiration and example—just because, with all his narrownesses and limitations, he drew his own inspiration not from the things that are seen and temporal, but from the things that are not seen and eternal.

## XXIV

### PREACHING

“ But hath in due times manifested His word through preaching.”—  
TITUS i. 3.

ST. PAUL'S epistles, as you know, are of two kinds : one, the epistle addressed to churches or communities ; the other, that addressed to some one individual. Such is the letter to Titus, of which we have heard the opening chapter this morning. This group of epistles is sometimes called by the epithet of Pastoral, because they concern the office of pastor. They are letters intended to teach the teachers ; to instruct those who would have in their turn to instruct others. So here, Paul writes to his “ own son,” as he calls him, Titus ; his own convert and disciple, whom he had left some time before at the head of the Church in Crete. Paul had placed him in the island to organise, to choose fellow-workers of the right kind, and to be himself a teacher and preacher to the Christian converts. It is made

evident to us that this could have been no easy task. The inhabitants of Crete had borne from old time a very indifferent character. Their reputation for truthfulness was very low—always a certain sign of low morale. And Judaising teachers, so the Apostle tells us, had been among them, who had humoured, if not pandered to, this imperfect sense of right and wrong, by making religion a matter of fables, and ceremonies, and intellectual refinements in matters of belief, instead of going straight for the moral obliquities of the people, and pointing out that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” And on these facts, and on this condition of things, St. Paul bases his whole epistle. They supply the key to his special injunctions to the head of the Church in Crete. “Speak *thou*,” he says, in contradistinction to the too alluring forms in which a false gospel had been preached in the island,—“Speak thou the things which become *sound* doctrine”; and the word the Apostle uses means literally “in good health”—healthy doctrine—the doctrine, that is to say, which tends to make those who receive it healthy: to strengthen and to brace them; to drive out ill humours, and to restore life to those who are diseased or ailing. St. Paul is here referring to the truth of doctrine as a thing to be tested by its

fruits. We do well not to forget this, because the word "sound" has acquired quite other and inferior meanings. When we say of a teacher or a fellow-Christian that he is not "sound" in his theology, we almost invariably mean that he is not orthodox, not "correct" in his statement of doctrine. Too often, I am afraid, we only mean that the person in question does not agree with us personally. But St. Paul, though he doubtless meant to teach that "sound doctrine" was also correct doctrine, meant a great deal more—and that more is very well worth our thinking of and pondering over. .

Now the juxtaposition in this first chapter of the word "preaching," and of the topics and the methods which the Apostle suggests to the preacher, seems to invite us very opportunely to the subject of sermons: a subject for obvious reasons not often dealt with by preachers, but one as to the use and abuse of which there is much that concerns the hearers. In our text the Apostle speaks of God having, at His wise and appointed seasons, "made His word manifest through preaching"—a function and duty that was committed to him, Paul, to perform. He, the Apostle, was first and foremost a preacher of that word, and it is obvious that he wishes his friend and disciple, Titus, to be in his turn a preacher also. Now I

think that we are too ready to assume that in the course of the Christian ages, meanings have come to be imported into the idea of "preaching" which did not originally belong to it. If so, we have perhaps been misled by a derivation. We all know that the word in the New Testament translated "preach" means literally "to proclaim." The root of it means a "herald," and the primary image suggested is that of an official messenger, proclaiming an authoritative document of peace or war. And the image is both true and inspiring. To preach the Gospel is to declare God's message of peace to the world with which He would fain be reconciled. But the question for us is not the word's derivation, but, How did the men who first used it understand it and act upon it? No one will question that St. Paul was himself a preacher, and one of the greatest of preachers. But the image of a herald—that is to say, some one appearing upon the scene with a brief and formal message, and delivering it without additions or comments of his own, the simple mouth-piece of the person employing him, delivering his message for the hearers to take or leave, is hardly, I think, the image that rises to our minds when we listen to St. Paul preaching. And we listen to him preaching whenever we read him in the pages of the

New Testament. He is for ever preaching, and for ever delivering the same message. That message never varies. He made himself, indeed, as he himself said, all things to all men that he might by some means win their assent and their surrender. But he never varied from or tampered with the message committed to him. He never strove by disguising or manipulating his language to tone down its severities, or minimise the miraculous element in it, in order thereby to conciliate those among his hearers for whom it had proved meat too strong. "Woe to him!" he said, "if he preached not the Gospel." But his method was not that of the bigot who, framing his message in the shortest possible terms, cries, "Take that and be saved; or reject it, and be lost." For St. Paul was a lover of men as well as a lover of God; though he could not have loved men so much had he not loved God more. And his method therefore was not to present, as it were, a pistol to their breasts; but to commend to them the message he was charged with; to show its reasonableness, its necessity, its justice, as well as its beauty and its compassionateness; by appealing in turn as witnesses to every faculty of mind, heart, and spirit with which God had endowed them. For he had learned, as every faithful preacher must

surely learn when in contact with a living, throbbing humanity, that his own soul, heart, and intellect must enter into the great work he is sent to do. He must be a preacher ; but to be that, he must be a teacher also !

And I need not dilate to you upon the wondrous equipment, of natural gifts and trained intellect, as well as of passionate zeal for the kingdom of righteousness, with which Paul was furnished for this two-fold work. His utterances are all "sermons," whether they come to us as spoken in the Acts of the Apostles, or as written in the various epistles to the scattered churches or congregations in which he was so deeply interested. It is our privilege to hear him on all sorts of occasions, and addressing the most separate ranks of society and diversities of intellect and capacity ; and the total impression he leaves upon us is one of *unity in diversity*—of the same message or Gospel commended, as occasion required, through every channel of the reason, the conscience, or the affections by which man can be reached and moved. For he had learned that man is a complex being, or rather that no two men are alike in the avenues by which truth wins its way to them, and he knew that no way can be a wrong way which leads to the foot of the cross. And so he has



in turn to argue with the philosopher and the metaphysician (and he dearly loved argument, as does every man who feels his own strength in it); he has to fight with and expose sophistry, wherever found, and not less to recognise and vindicate truth wherever it existed, even in his opponents; he has to comfort the humble and fearful, and to dislodge from their fancied security the proud and self-satisfied; to deal alternately with the highest mysteries of Christian theology, and with the humblest and most prosaic duties of the family and the home, declaring always that between those highest mysteries and these lowly duties there is a connection vital and organic, for that the very Incarnation of the divine Word took place that men might do those duties more perfectly, and with a more loving devotion; to rebuke fiercely, without fear or favour; to exhort, to comfort, to plead, to touch the heart and the emotions, and to lift the hearer into the region of the divine by that noblest eloquence, the eloquence of a passionate enthusiasm for all that is lovely and of good report. This was the idea and the method of Paul the Apostle, as at once preacher and teacher. And that which runs through and binds together the whole like a thread of gold, is the absolute sincerity and singleness of purpose of the

man, which shames the most hostile critic from suggesting that he is ever playing his own game ; ever using arguments that he knows to be unsound, in the hope that his hearers will not detect their unsoundness ; or ever using language that will captivate as language, irrespective of the truth it conveys.

Whatever, therefore, we may choose to understand by Preaching, this is what Paul understood by it. Whatever was his theory, this was his practice ; and it at least forbids us to wrong the office of the preacher and the function of the sermon by attaching to them meanings based upon a too literal interpretation of the office of herald.<sup>1</sup> St. Paul's idea of a sermon was based upon the continual presence to his mind's eye of the nature, the capacities, and the needs of his hearers. His understanding of his fellow-Christians ; his grasp of their "infinite variety" and susceptibility to influence ; his love of them and his sense of the sacredness of every human endowment of reason and feeling,—all forbade his narrowing the idea of a sermon to the simple reiteration of some cherished dogma, delivered in the same terms, supported by the same argument, and claiming the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ainger seems to have had in view some of the remarks on Preaching of that great Templar, John Selden. See his *Table-Talk*, s.v. Preaching.

same unquestioning acquiescence. And if this was his view of the preacher's responsibility—and it is evidently the same as that taken by his contemporary apostles, though we have fewer and briefer specimens of them from which to generalise—it can hardly be pleaded that after eighteen centuries, during which the intellect of man has played freely over Christian dogma in its defence or else its disparagement, the office of preacher stands in need of any narrower interpretation. The History of the Sermon, tracing it as an influence throughout the Christian ages, noting the times and conditions under which it was either unduly extolled or unduly depreciated, would be very interesting and possibly instructive. Many here are old enough to have watched a great change during their own life in the importance assigned to the sermon in Christian worship. In the days of the evangelical revival, itself the sequel and result of the earlier revival under Wesley and Whitfield, a revival effected largely through preaching, it was natural that the sermon came to be overvalued, and to throw into the shade of neglect other and far more important channels of divine grace. But men—and not least so Churchmen—are ever the subject of reaction, and in the swing of the pendulum that has brought for the time being a very different school to

Ready (1746)

the front, and restored to their just place many truths before suspended, the sermon has been deposed from its old height, and though not openly disparaged, is probably nowadays underestimated as a leverage by which thought, heart, and conduct may be raised to higher levels, to higher loves, and higher aims. The very fact that in the Nonconformist world the sermon has been given a prominence far too great, is probably the reason why in the scheme of the High Churchman it is allowed one far too little. For who is there, to whatever school or party he may belong, who, if only he has been through life an earnest seeker of divine truth, does not look back to, and thank God for, the blessings of varied kind that have come to him through sermons, whether heard or read? Who is there that cannot recall from days and hours of public worship, utterances that have even in some instances marked a turning-point in their spiritual course; or, if not, have thrown new light on obscurities, supplied new guidance in duty, new encouragements and consolations making for trust in the divine kingdom? Only mark the proviso I just now inserted—"if only he has been a seeker after divine truth." For just as the eye must bring with it its power of seeing, so the ear must bring its power of hearing, which is but its

*will* to hear. Believe it well, only the cold-hearted and unspiritual will under-rate the office of the preacher. Only the fool and the flippant will laugh at it. For though there may be sermons that are perfunctory and unprofitable, still, just as we are not so illogical as to deny that we have learned from the poets, because much poetry is mediocre, so we shall hardly decline to be thankful to the pulpit for its successes, merely because of its many and inevitable failures.

My brethren, you will say that I am indeed "magnifying my office"; and how, on such a day, and standing where I am, should I do otherwise?<sup>1</sup> For how can I forget this day, what you are one and all recalling, the voice and brain and heart that have spoken to you for twenty-five years past from this place, and now will be heard here no more? And yet how can I dwell upon, or attempt to estimate, the gifts and resources, still less indulge in praise of one still happily, though absent, in fullest enjoyment of mind and powers? Yet, at the same time, speaking of the Pulpit and its power, it would be affectation to pass by so eminent an illustration, so bound up with the life of this Church; nor with this Church only, for

<sup>1</sup> Preached in the Temple Church, 4th November 1894, on the Sunday after the resignation of the Mastership by Dr. Vaughan.

few preachers of our time have made their beneficent influence travel farther through the English-speaking world. And, putting on one side the obvious reasons for this—the scholarship and learning, the mastery of the Greek Testament; the unflinching freshness of thought and treatment; the euphuistic grace, always dignified and elevated by its spirituality, often recalling his far-off relative and namesake, Henry Vaughan, the Silurist—putting, I say, on one side these partly intellectual endowments, which never in themselves alone could win and retain the allegiance of the hearer, may I not speak of those yet “more excellent” gifts—the deep understanding of the human heart; the singular power of reading the conscience; the detecting of the many sophistries of the human will; the laying of the hand on them never without tenderness, with “*here* thou ailest, and *here*”? And last, but surely not least among such gifts, the rare and blessed one of moderation, seeking ever to avoid the falsehood of extremes, though incurring the inevitable penalty (if penalty it be) that all extreme men passed coldly by, and no party journal ever spoke the applauding word! But there is compensation even for the scorn of the religious newspaper in the knowledge that by thousands of homely, and uncontroversial, hearths lives have been

purified and affections quickened by the preacher's winged words!

Great must be the responsibility of following such a man, though swallowed up in the vaster responsibility of all whose calling it is to be ambassadors of Christ. But is there not, my brethren, a responsibility of the hearer as well as the teacher, and not least so in a church such as this, where there are no other ties uniting its very various congregation than those of common worship and common discipleship? In the Temple Church (from the nature of the case) there exist none of those ties which in so many other churches bind congregations in yet firmer and more effectual bonds—those, I mean, of interest in the welfare of the parish, manifested by common effort, common offerings and sacrifices, for the spiritual or material needs of its members. In this place we have no such opportunity—no channel of ministry to our poorer neighbours save that allowed to our communicants. Unless therefore the idea of social responsibility is kept alive within us through our highest act of fellowship in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, through our weekly services, and through the teaching of this Church, our worship might easily (may it not be so already, alas! with some of us?) degrade into that which the

great King of Israel saw to be the most unprofitable, unacceptable worship—the offering that costs us nothing! Therefore, if—as is our hope and trust—it may please God still in this Church to “manifest His word through preaching,” the expounder of His manifold and unfathomed message has at once a more arduous task, and is less assisted by other influences for good co-operating in other churches. The teacher has a harder task, but so has the learner, and each must seek in his place to remember it. But I do not forget that this Church of ours, if it have the defects of its exceptional character, has also the merits and advantages of it. The casual worshipper may be found here, perhaps, oftener than in other churches. The manifold beauties and associations may draw those as yet inaccessible to a holier, a diviner invitation. In Christ’s name we bid them welcome, for we cannot gauge, and dare not limit, the possible influences of the atmosphere of worship, or of the sound and the power of the divine message. Only, we would add the warning, that if divine worship does not soften, it indurates: if heart and conscience, subjected week by week to divine pleadings and warnings, remain untouched, they do not therefore remain the same, but are less and less susceptible, as time moves



onwards, to that voice which is ever speaking to the soul, to save it from the death that cannot die! Meantime, we would not have the beauty and associations of this ancient Church less attractive—less potent—only that they should be means to an end, and that end the most vital, the most glorious, that the heart of man can conceive.

A well-known scholar and thinker who spoke for the first time from this pulpit a few weeks since, wrote to me afterwards how he had been moved by the splendour of the scene—not least so, he said, by the sea of up-turned faces that met his gaze. “Although,” he said, “I have preached more than once in the University pulpits, I have never seen a sight which impressed me so much.” May such a sight be seen for many a year to come; only may the up-turned faces mean the uplifting of the heart to God—the panting of the soul for the water-springs that mean salvation and life — and the victory that overcometh the world!

THE END

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